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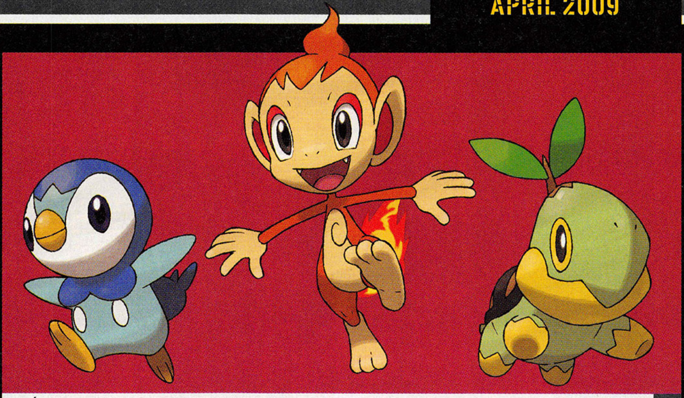

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GRAND SLAM TENNIS 58

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DS = NINTENDO DS
GBC = GAME BOY COLOR
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare

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Pulse

Staying Power

Chris Slate

When Pokémon first hit it big, naysayers wrote off the games as a passing fad. Well, over a decade later, Pokémon mania is still running wild, which got me thinking: what is it about long-running series that keeps them popular?

The folks at Nintendo would be able to answer that question better than anyone, having successfully maintained Mario, Metroid, Zelda, and many more of gaming's longest-lasting franchises. Of course, having top development talent is critical, along with the budget and resources needed to produce top-quality titles. A single lackluster installment, without top creators or enough new ideas to keep things fresh, can doom a series. Conversely, the makers of the Mario and Zelda games have been great at mixing things up while retaining the core gameplay fans want.

Keeping just one series hot is tough; the fact that Nintendo has succeeded with so many proves the publisher is one of the best.

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Wii
BOOM BLOX: BASH PARTY
WORLD EXCLUSIVE look at Spielberg's next blockbuster!
NINTENDO POWER
2008 AWARD WINNERS
FIRE EMBLEM: SHADOW DRAGON
MARIO & LUIGI RPG 3
SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SURVIVOR
SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT
POKÉMON PLATINUM
First look at the next big adventure!
THE CONDUIT
We reveal the online multiplayer in Wii's biggest FPS
SEE IT HERE FIRST!
INDIANA JONES and the STAFF OF KINGS
Crack the whip, dodge traps, solve puzzles, and throw an octopus in the next big adventure game for Wii
Future

V239 MARCH 2009

Chris Slate here, back once again to answer your letters while taking a break from teaching my Zubat to fetch Cokes from the soda machine. But first, this month's special letter request: what would be the coolest thing that Nintendo could reveal at June's E3 video game expo? Send your responses to the address on page 8, and we'll print the best ones!

LETTERS

HEARING THINGS PART TWO

This is a reply to the letter-writer in the March issue (Vol. 239) that thought he heard Donkey Kong speak French in Mario Kart Wii. I wanted to add that I have heard strange things from video game characters that don't say any words. Midna from Twilight Princess always blabbers nonsense, right? Well, in the fourth dungeon, my brother changed into Wolf Link and it sounded like Midna said, "I'll give you kibbles." **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

MISSING MOLE

In Vol. 236, in the list of famous moles that ran in Playback, why didn't you guys include Resetti from Animal Crossing? He's one of the most infamous (and annoying) video game moles of all time.
—(NO NAME GIVEN)

Oops! You're right: there aren't many video game moles as beloved—er, as well known—as the loquacious Resetti. I hope he didn't see the article; there's no telling how long his rant might last.

MIND GAMES

When I saw your interview with Suda51 discussing No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle, the first thing I did was run to my computer to write you. I was reminded of a paradox from the original No More Heroes: when you beat the game, Sylvia says, "Too bad there won't be a sequel," but immediately afterwards you get a message saying, "To be continued." What was up with that? Were the designers trying to play with our minds? Was the whole thing an error? **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

I can't say for sure, but I took those messages as another example of the game's crazy, offbeat sense of humor. Speaking of which, did you catch the cool-as-all-get-out *Rocky III* homage at the very end?

Twilight Princess's Midna is creepy enough without imagining her talking. Remember to take breaks as you play!

I nearly fainted when I saw the Boom Blox Bash Party feature in Vol. 239. The first Boom Blox doesn't get enough credit (it lost your Best Puzzle Game award to Professor Layton? Boo!). Its level editor rocked, and Bash Party will let you trade custom stages online! Everybody better give this game its due. **–STACY M.**

You don't have to tell *us*, Stacy—we scored the first game an 8.0, and the sequel is looking even better. But don't *you* go knocking the prof., or we're going to have problems!

BACK WITH A BOOM

Steven Spielberg and Electronic Arts prepare to blow us away once more with Boom Blox: Bash Party.

LAST YEAR'S BOOM BLOX typifies Wii at its finest. The brainchild of legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg, it's accessible without being shallow, it's a blast to play with friends, and it makes smart, effective use of motion controls to offer an experience not possible on any other platform. Part puzzle game, part virtual toy box, the title revolves around the simplest of concepts—having fun with building blocks. No matter who you are, it turns out there's something primordially satisfying about stacking them up, knocking them down, or blowing them to smithereens. As Amir Rahimi, the game's producer, points out, "That's what makes Spielberg Spielberg—the ability to put his finger on what's compelling for just about every human being on the planet."

Ayla: This village?
But no person.
Maybe near?

CALL IT EVEN!

In Vol. 233, Disgaea DS was given a 7.5, docked 2.5 points only because it was a remake. Then, in Vol. 236, you gave Chrono Trigger a 9.0, and in Vol. 239, both Dragon Quest IV and Fire Emblem received 8.5s, even though they were remakes, too! I've played both the original and remade versions of the first two games, and I think the remakes were equally good. So make up your mind! Do you like remakes of old RPGs or not? **–BOOKWORM**

I'll ask our resident retro-remake expert Chris Hoffman to answer this one: [Hoffman sits at Slate's desk, his face screwed up in concentration.] Well, we actually *liked* all of those titles. We don't automatically dock games points just for being remakes, but since it had been only about a year since Disgaea was last released, we had to take that into account. Not only had Chrono Trigger been away longer, but we thought it was a superior game overall. Also, Dragon Quest IV was vastly improved over its NES incarnation, and Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon had never hit North America before.

A SAD DAY

What do you think of how Disney is making games out of TV shows like *Hannah Montana* and *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*? I think they are a shame to Nintendo systems, because they are boring and poorly animated. It was a sad day when I bought one. **–JACK**

THE DS-TROYER

I love the DS so much; I'm on my fourth one! My first DS fell victim to a Juice Baby Bottle Pop, the second was stolen on a cruise ship, I sold my third one, and my current DS is lost somewhere in my house with one of its hinges broken. I can't wait for the Nintendo DSi! **–(NO NAME GIVEN)**

What in the...?! Sorry pal, but I'm revoking your gamer's license. If you try to buy a Nintendo DSi, I will show up at the store and tackle you. We've got to make sure these beauties find a good home, you know.

BRING ON THE RPGS

I'm excited about the flood of RPGs expected to release throughout 2009. I love RPGs; my favorites are the Dragon Quest games. I prefer RPGs that let you roam free. You're often sent out into a world (with a storyline and objective, of course) and you have free reign of where you want to go. I think it expands the boundaries and adds a lot to the game. I also think there is great potential in the gaming world for a Wario RPG. **–(NO NAME GIVEN)**

A Wario RPG sounds like a great idea since the Wario Land and WarioWare games have already given Wario a world of characters, power-ups, and locations to have fun with. Plus, it would be worth playing a Wario RPG just to see what kind of motley crew the tubby treasure hunter would put together.

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

Chrono Trigger is overrated. I was told it was a good game, but when I gave the Super NES version a shot, I wasn't impressed. There was absolutely no story, I found the battles to be really weird, and the music wasn't so great, either. I made it to the prehistoric era and I lost knowledge of what I was even doing, at which point I quit. I didn't think it deserved to be nominated for Game of the Year, so I'd like to ask why you think it's so great. **–(NO NAME GIVEN)**

Since Chrono Trigger is one of my all-time favorite games, I was going to take this letter as a personal affront, until I got to the part about how you lost knowledge of what you were even doing. Clearly you've gone senile or have suffered severe head trauma, and I don't mock crazy, senile fools; I pity them. To answer your question, though, we here at NP like the game because of its accurate historical portrayal of the Lavos Apocalypse of 1999. That was a rough week.

Handle the Nintendo DSi with care.

The coolest movie-to-game translation would be *I Am Legend*. I'm sure a powerful developer like Capcom could re-create the heart-pounding action and mood of a post-apocalyptic world. The gameplay could be like Resident Evil 4, and it would be a perfect fit for Wii. —**ACEROX**

WHAT MOVIE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE AS A Wii OR DS GAME?

The movie that I would love to see made into a Wii or DS game is, without a doubt, *Spirited Away*. I just love that movie, and it would make a great video game! Like when Chihiro versus No Face—now that would be cool! —**DARK PRINCESS PEACH**

I would like to see a video game based on the movie *Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny*; it could work sort of like Rock Band, except with songs from Tenacious D. The story mode could follow the events of the movie, with the copious swearing included, and in the end you would have a rock-off with Beezleboss. The DS version could come with a Pick of Destiny pick, like the pick that comes with the DS Guitar Hero games. —**EPEEFENCER92**

The movie I would want turned into a game is *Twilight*...NOT! I know this is a bit off topic, but I can't stand that book/movie. Nothing against the fans of *Twilight*, but I can't imagine a gamer liking the awful thing. Now, a movie that I would really want to be turned into a game is *iCarly: iGo to Japan* (you didn't say I couldn't pick a Nickelodeon TV movie!). I'd get the game the day it came out! Oh, yeah! —**TWILIGHTHATER**

I would like to see Spaceballs: The Game. Imagine piloting the flying RV through space, using the Schwartz to move objects, or using motion controls for Spaceballs: The Flame Thrower. With Wii MotionPlus the final battle with Dark Helmet would be epic! From - **CLONESHAVEFEELINGSTOO**

I think *Death Race* would be good on Wii. You could play as any of the different drivers in the movie and you'd get points for blowing up other cars. When you're not racing, you could use these points to upgrade your car and buy new weapons. The Wii Wheel could be used for steering. —**ROBERT**

Race cars that shoot at each other? Why wasn't *Death Race* ever made into a video game?

It would have to be *Pulp Fiction* because it is the best movie ever. You could have boxing levels, driving levels, and shooting levels. If not that, my second nominee would be *Escape from New York* with hang gliding and fighting crazy people. What more could one ask for? (No, not Chuck Norris, or ninjas, or pirates.) —**NO NAME GIVEN**

How about a game based Jim Henson's wonderful film *Labyrinth*? The game would have puzzles galore with chances for occasional action, and be set in a new world with another girl that has been seduced by the Goblin King. Another reason this should be made: I don't know of any games that have scores composed by David Bowie. —**CALVIN**

These are all pretty good suggestions; in fact, I'm surprised that many of these movies haven't been made into games already. My pick would be Stephen Chow's *Kung Fu Hustle*. Not only would its martial arts action be great in a game, but the flick is funny too, with outrageous characters.

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Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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BUSINESS
PUBLISHER **Kelley Corten, 650-745-9225, kcorten@futureus.com**
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **David Cooper 646-723-5447, dcooper@futureus.com**
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR - GAMES GROUP **Nate Hunt, 562-983-8004, nhunt@futureus.com**
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR (Bay Area) **Christina Perez, 206-417-3315, cperez@futureus.com**
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR (Southwest) **Isaac Uguy, 949-218-0981, iuguy@futureus.com**
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE **Benjamin Alessio 650-238-2324, balessio@futureus.com**
DIRECTOR, CORPORATE SALES & MARKETING **Jim Schiekofer, 646-723-5410, jschiekofer@futureus.com**
CORP. SALES MIDWEST MANAGER **Jodi Sosna 212-217-1358, jsosna@futureus.com**
CORP. SALES WEST MANAGER **Nadine Weiss 323-493-5929, nweiss@futureus.com**
AD PROJECT MANAGER **Rhoda Ushijima 650-238-2474, rushijima@futureus.com**
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR **Arthur St. Germain, 650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com**
MARKETING MANAGER **Andrea Recio-Ang, arecio-ang@futureus.com**

PRODUCTION
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR **Larry Briseno**
PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR **Jennifer Lim**

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FUTURE US, Inc.
4000 Shoreline Court,
Ste 400, South San
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FUTURE PLC
30 Monmouth St., Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW, England
www.futureplc.com
Tel +44 1225 442244
www.futureplc.com

NON-EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN: Roger Parry
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Nintendo Power Customer Care
P.O. Box 5770
Harlan, IA 51593-1270
1-866-941-8368
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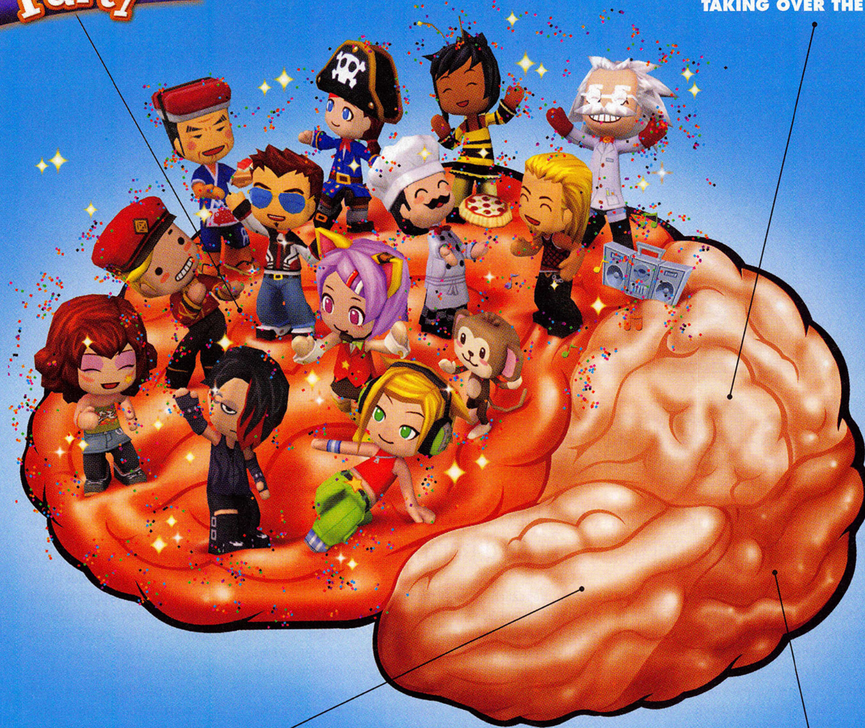
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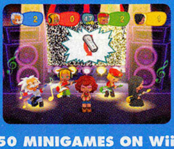

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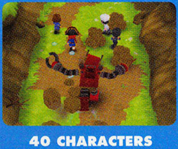

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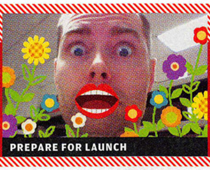
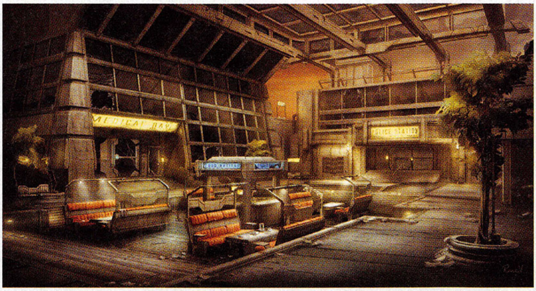
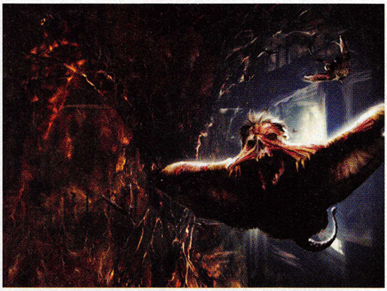






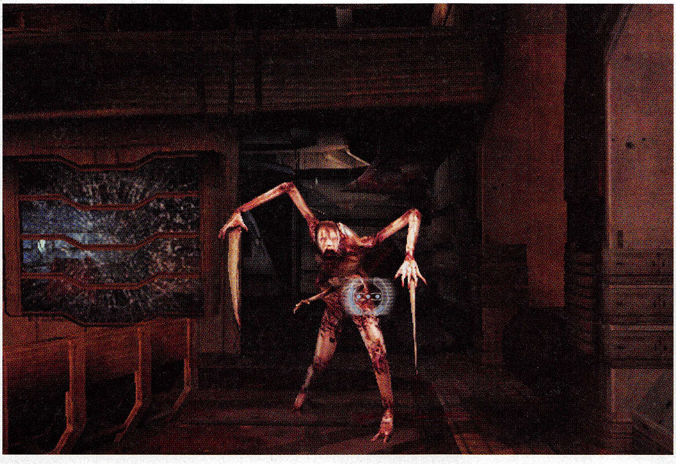
The Fatal Frontier

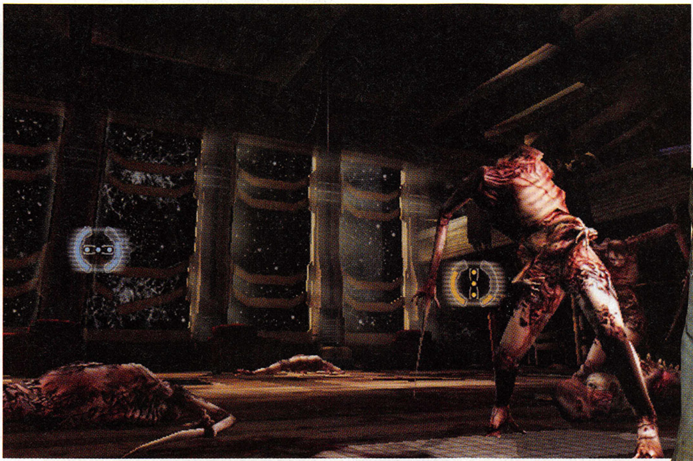
No one can hear you scream in Dead Space Extraction, the Wii-exclusive prequel to EA's survival-horror hit Dead Space.

The Mature-rated survival-horror title Dead Space proved popular with gamers due in part to its eerie atmosphere and engaging narrative. Of course, there was also the fact that the game was set on a dark spaceship filled with lots of creepy creatures called Necromorphs that you could dismember with all manner of futuristic weaponry. Unfortunately, Wii owners were left out in the cold as the game was released only on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360. But the tables will turn this fall with the release of the Wii-exclusive Dead Space Extraction.

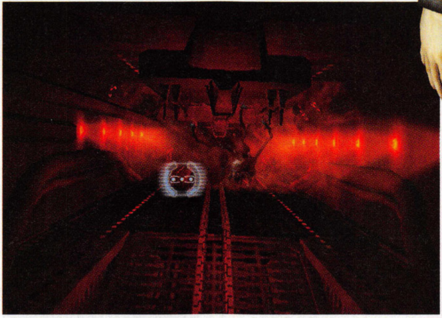
"There's a ton of information in the Dead Space universe, I mean as far as fiction goes," explains Dead Space Extraction executive producer Steve Papoutsis. "And one of the goals for the property was to have a large canon, so to speak, so there's so much content there that we decided it would be great to introduce Dead Space to the Wii audience. And by doing so with Extraction, we're actually letting those users get into the fiction from the beginning." Adds Glen Schofield, the vice president and general manager of EA Redwood Shores, "The Dead Space story is so big that we just wanted to tell more of it. What happens before [original Dead Space protagonist] Isaac arrived on the [spaceship] *Ishimura* is such a compelling and action-packed adventure that creating a new experience was really the best way to go."

Papoutsis elaborates on the premise of this prequel: "The game starts out on Aegis VII, which is the colony where [an artifact known as] the Marker is found, and you're going to meet all-new characters and experience the moments that lead up to the events that lead into Dead Space 1." The main character—or should we say *characters* since the game





[Above] Since Extraction is an on-rails shooter, you don't have to worry about a split-screen when playing cooperatively.



features co-op play—is entirely new, though you won't be able to see anyone, including new heroine Lexine, right away since Extraction is played entirely from the first-person perspective.

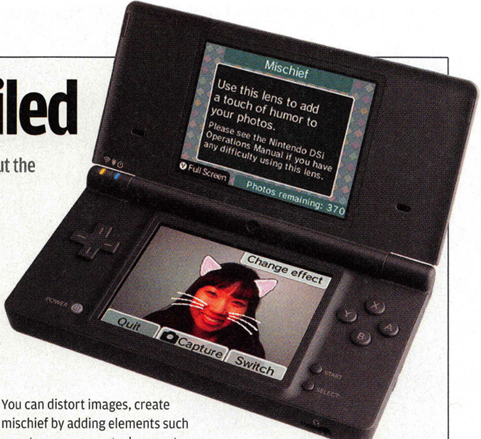
Naturally, Extraction has several other differences from its predecessor, as Papoutsis explains: "[Wii] allows us to have unique controls that stand out apart from any other type of game. We have a very wide range of mechanics in Dead Space Extraction, and being able to tap into the Wii Remote and Nunchuk was just a natural fit for us. It allows for superior aiming. It allows for a very cinematic presentation of the game. And it creates a very frenetic kind of pace." Using the Wii Remote as a pointer, you can pick up objects in the environment by using telekinesis (which is useful for grabbing faraway healing items or for chucking objects at baddies) or use your stasis power to slow down incoming Necromorphs, making them easier to dismember with your initial weapon, the rivet gun. The weapon's rivets are like horizontal slashes of a blade, so they're handy for, say, severing the legs off your opponent. If you twist the Remote 90 degrees, however, the slices are vertical—perfect for cleaving off arms and other appendages.

Additionally, motion controls come into play for shaking off any monsters that grab you (waggle the Remote and Nunchuk) and for reloading (flick the Nunchuk). At one point in the game, for instance, you're in the dank water tunnels on the *Ishimura* and you've got a glow rod in your hand that you recharge by shaking the Remote. Even the Wii Remote's speaker comes into play for the many audio logs you find throughout the game, which give you background details you might not know otherwise.

Suffice it to say EA is pulling out all the stops for Dead Space Extraction. As Schofield tells us, "We're bringing the same intensity, production values, and action/horror to Wii as we did with the original game. Not only is it a great stand-alone story and game...but if you've played the first one, then Extraction offers even more of the backstory and universe of the Dead Space franchise to its fans." **—JUSTIN C.**

Nintendo DSi Detailed

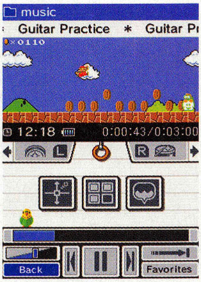
When? How much? Nintendo answers your burning questions about the next step in handheld gaming.


Mischief
Full Screen
Photos remaining: 370
Change effect
Quit
Capture
Switch
POWER
START
SELECT
X
Y
A
B

Use this lens to add a touch of humor to your photos.
Please see the Nintendo DSi Operations Manual if you have any difficulty using this lens.

Ever since the Nintendo DSi—a new and improved version of the DS—was announced late last year and subsequently released in Japan, North American gamers have been awaiting news of the system's release on this side of the Pacific. Well, mark your calendar; the Nintendo DSi will be landing in stores on April 5, 2009 in two colors (Black and Ice Blue), carrying a $169.99 suggested retail price.

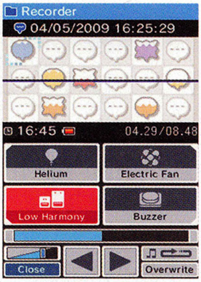
The Nintendo DSi is slimmer and sleeker than the DS Lite, and boasts slightly bigger screens, but that's merely the tip of the iceberg. It also ushers in a new era of customization and interactivity thanks to its added hardware features. Perhaps the most important additions are built-in flash memory and a slot for an SD memory card, both of which allow you to save a variety of content, such as software you'll be able to download from the Nintendo DSi Shop. Although the details have yet to be finalized as of press time, the Nintendo DSi Shop should be up and running at or near the system's launch, and it will give users the chance to purchase DSiWare (or in some cases receive it for free) using DSi Points (similar to Wii Points on the Wii Shop Channel). Titles such as a new WarioWare and new entries in the Art Style puzzle series have been released in Japan and are under consideration for North American release, and other games are in the works.


music
Guitar Practice * Guitar Pr
×0110
12:18
0:00:43/0:03:00
L
R
Back
Favorites

DOUBLE TRUE!!

With Nintendo DSi, you too can take photos that are this awesome.

In addition, two .3-megapixel cameras—one on the inner hinge of the Nintendo DSi (to photograph the user), and one on the outside of the shell (to photograph pretty much everything else)—allow you to take photos and manipulate them in a variety of fun ways. The camera software features 10 special filters that let you alter pictures as you take them or augment saved pictures later. You can distort images, create mischief by adding elements such as cat ears or a mustache, create a mirrored or kaleidoscope-style picture, add emotions (happiness, sadness, anger) to people's faces, create a morphing effect, focus on specific colors, and more. You can even snap a picture then use the touch screen to turn it into a frame that you can insert another picture into. Of course, you'll be able to save the photos to the SD card and transfer them to other devices to share them with friends.

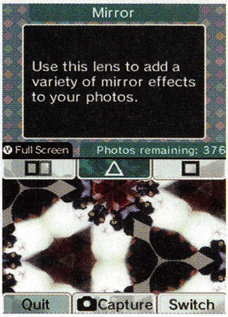

Recorder
04/05/2009 16:25:29
16:45
04.29/08.48
Helium
Electric Fan
Low Harmony
Buzzer
Close
Overwrite

[Above] Record your own sounds, then use audio filters to change them in goofy ways.

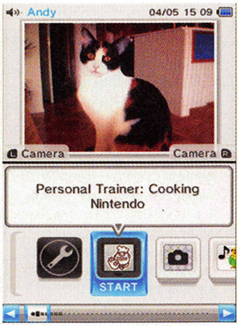
By saving AAC-format music files to the SD card, you can use the Nintendo DSi as a music player, as well. Like with the camera, though, there's more to the music player than just the basics. You can change the speed and pitch of the songs you're listening to, add numerous audio effects and sound filters (an olde-tyme radio sound, for example), and activate several interactive visualizers—including one with a Mario theme—that turn your music into a game of sorts. If playing with other people's music isn't enough, you can also record and alter your own sound clips.

Though the Nintendo DSi does not include the Game Boy Advance cartridge slot, the unit's enhanced form and functionality promise to more than make up for it, and should breathe new life into handheld gaming. You'll be able to play the Nintendo DSi for yourself in only a few short weeks.

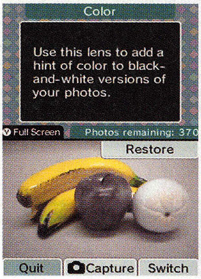
—CHRIS H.


Mirror
Full Screen
Photos remaining: 376
Quit
Capture
Switch

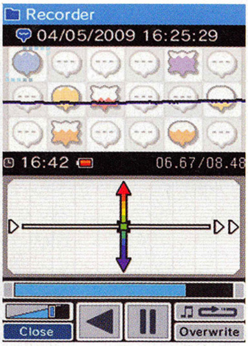
Use this lens to add a variety of mirror effects to your photos.


Andy
04/05 15 09
Camera
Camera
START

Personal Trainer: Cooking
Nintendo

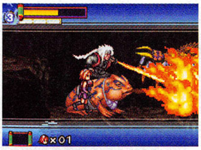

Color
Full Screen
Photos remaining: 370
Restore
Quit
Capture
Switch

Use this lens to add a hint of color to black-and-white versions of your photos.

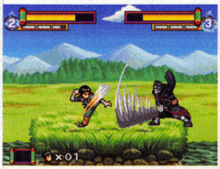

Recorder
04/05/2009 16:25:29
16:42
06.67/08.48
Close
Overwrite

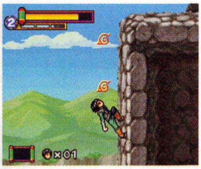
All Grown Up

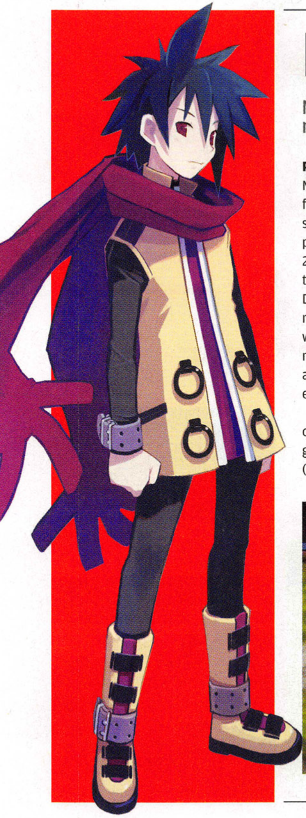
Naruto and his pals get older and wiser in **Naruto Shippuden: Ninja Council 4** for DS.



If you've been following the Naruto manga and/or anime, you've probably been waiting impatiently for a Wii or DS game based on the Shippuden story arc—where the narrative jumps ahead two and a half years—to hit North America. If so, you're in luck: Tomy is releasing Naruto Shippuden: Ninja Council 4 for DS this summer. Developed by Aspect, Ninja Council 4 is a platformer that follows the story of Naruto traveling to the Hidden Village of Sand to rescue the Kazekage from the clutches of the evil group known as Akatsuki. He's not alone, though: you can choose from a roster of 17 characters—each of whom have unique jutsus that can be unleashed via the touch screen—and create a three-man squad to take down your enemies. Of course, if you really want to put your team to the test you can fight up to three of your friends in Battle mode. **—JUSTIN C.**





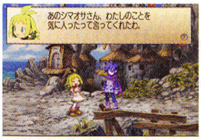


Brave's New World

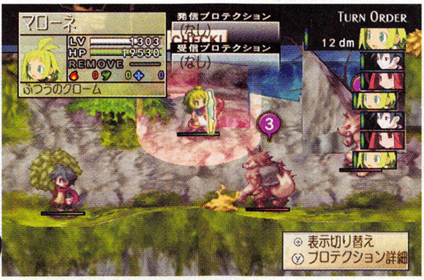
NIS America is testing the Wii waters with an enhanced remake of the cult classic **Phantom Brave**.

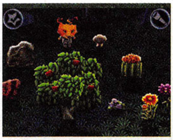
Phantom Brave may not be NIS America's best-known franchise, but the game earned strong reviews and a small but passionate following upon its 2004 PlayStation 2 release. Like the publisher's more famous Disgaea series, Phantom Brave mixes quirky art and storytelling with dozens of unique combat mechanics to make for a deep and unconventional strategy-RPG experience.

The Wii remake features all of the content of the original game, plus a brand-new chapter (complete with new characters and newly recorded voices) that revisits the cast at some point after the PlayStation 2 version's ending. NIS America is also promising new characters and items, upgraded graphics, and a revamped interface to make the game more accessible to new players. Phantom Brave is set for a June 23rd release. **—CASEY L.**



あのシマオサさん、わたしのことを
気に入ったって言ってくれたわ。

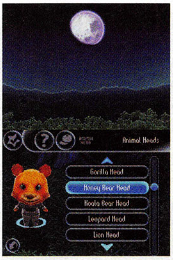


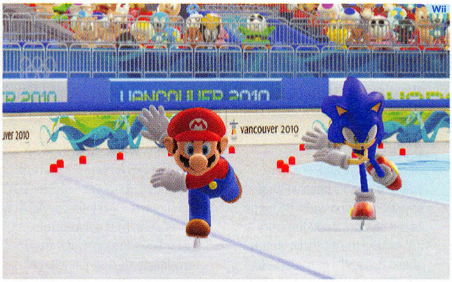


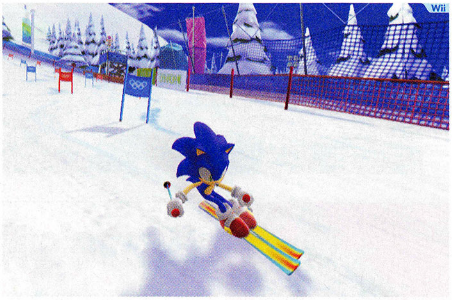
Web Gems

Detect a wireless hotspot, get a prize. That's the premise behind **Treasure World**, which awards you with a new bauble every time you make an internet connection. The way it works is similar to the Bark mode in Nintendogs: when your DS is on but closed, the game will unlock one of what publisher Aspyr promises will be "thousands and thousands" of items every time it finds a hotspot. Among the treasures are items that you can use to customize your character or decorate the in-game world à la Animal Crossing, and if you have objects other players covet, you can trade them away. The game's website will allow players to share details about their findings. The play is not all in connecting and collecting, however. Missions within the game will keep you occupied while you're not surfing for booty. Expect details to emerge as the game's summer launch approaches.

–GEORGE S.





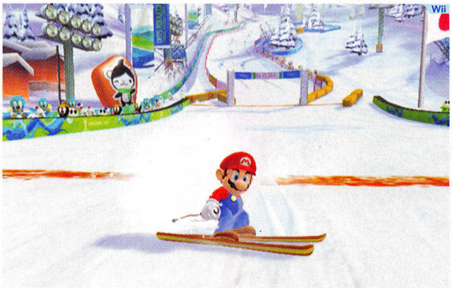


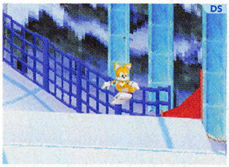
Cold Fusion

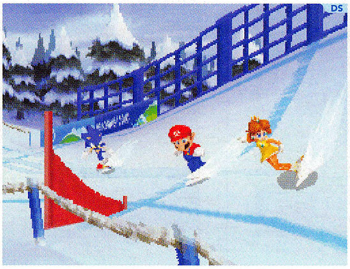
Gaming's greatest icons go for the gold once more in **Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games**.

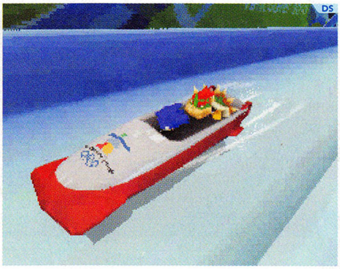
Given the phenomenal success of their first Olympics-themed showdown (more than 10 million copies sold worldwide), it should come as no surprise that plumber and hedgehog are set to renew their rivalry on the snow-covered slopes of Vancouver, British Columbia. Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games pits the beloved mascots against each other in a host of brand-new events, including alpine skiing, bobsledding, and speed skating. (For the record, we feel that Sonic's lack of pants puts him at a distinct disadvantage in the freezing temperatures.) Like the previous game, this one is coming to both Wii and DS, with development duties handled by Sega of Japan under the guidance of Nintendo's EAD studio and Shigeru Miyamoto. The character roster will consist of all of the competitors who appeared in the first game, as well as some new challengers that remain shrouded in secrecy for now.

Sega is similarly tight-lipped on additional details, but we know the Wii version will offer both co-op and competitive split-screen multiplayer (the DS game is competitive only). The publisher also promises Wii Balance Board compatibility for certain events. No word yet on the possibility of online play, but we're keeping our fingers crossed. Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games is slated for a late 2009 release. Look for the full hands-on report in an upcoming issue. —**STEVE T.**

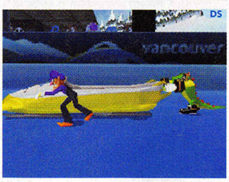








[Below] Meet Team Bottom of the Barrel: Waluigi and Vector the Croc.



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Suggestive Themes
Violent References
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IGNITION entertainment
a UTV enterprise
Strap?
Liu
Cool
Takano

I prioritized securing the target

Ah! You're... We met last night, right?!

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GAME WATCH FORECAST

Wii		
Arc Rise Fantasia	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	SPR 09
Boom Blox Bash Party	Electronic Arts	SPR 09
A Boy and His Blob	Majesco	FALL 09
Brave: A Warrior's Tale	SouthPeak	7/09
Chaotic	Activision	FALL 09
The Conduit	Sega	SPR 09
Cursed Mountain	Deep Silver	2009
Dance Dance Revolution: Disney Grooves	Konami	4/09
Dead Space Extraction	Electronic Arts	FALL 09
The Destiny of Zorro	505 Games	TBA
DiRT 2*	Codemasters	2009
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	TBA
EA Sports Active	Electronic Arts	SPR 09
Excitebots: Trick Racing	Nintendo	4/09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	6/09
GI Joe	Electronic Arts	SUM 09
Go Play Circus Star	Majesco	FALL 09
Go Play City Sports	Majesco	SUM 09
Go Play LumberJax	Majesco	5/09
Grand Slam Tennis	EA Sports	2009
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core Plus	Aksys	4/09
Guitar Hero Greatest Hits	Activision	2009
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Help Wanted	Hudson	SUM 09
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	LucasArts	SPR 09
Indoor Sports	Konami	TBA
Klonoa	Namco Bandai	Q2 09
Let's Tap	Sega	SUM 09
Little King's Story	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	5/09
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games	Sega	2009
Mini Ninjas	Eidos	FALL 09
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	XSEED/ Marvelous USA	2nd Half 09
MySims Racing	Electronic Arts	2009
Need for Speed Nitro	Electronic Arts	Q3 09
No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle	TBA	2010
Our House: Party!	Majesco	6/09
Overlord Dark Legend	Codemasters	1st Half 09
Phantom Brave	NIS America	6/09
Pirates vs. Ninjas Dodgeball	SouthPeak	4/09
Play the World	DreamCatcher	6/09
Punch-Out!!	Nintendo	TBA
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Pyroblazer	TBA	TBA
Real Heroes: Firefighter	Conspiracy	Q2 09
Redneck Chicken Riot	City Interactive	Q2 09
Reel Fishing: Angler's Dream	Natsume	5/09
Roogoo: Twisted Towers	SouthPeak	4/09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Sam & Max Season Two	Atari	2009
Samurai Shodown Anthology	SNK Playmore	2009
Sin and Punishment 2	Nintendo	2009
Skate City Heroes	Zoo	Q1 09
Spore Hero	Electronic Arts	2009
Spyborgs	Capcom	2009
Story Hour Adventures	Zoo	2009
Story Hour Fairy Tales	Zoo	2009
Super PickUps	XS Games	Q1 09
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Smash Up	Ubisoft	9/09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	Activision	2009
Trivial Pursuit	Electronic Arts	Q2 09
Virtua Tennis 2009	Sega	5/09
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	SPR 09
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	Activision	5/09

NINTENDO DS		
101-in-1 Explosive Megamix	Atlus	4/09
Again: Eye of Providence	Tecmo	SPR 09
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Brave: Shaman's Challenge	SouthPeak	7/09
Chaotic	Activision	FALL 09
The Dark Spire	Atlus	4/09
Dawn of Heroes	Majesco	6/09
de Blob	THQ	Q2 09
DiRT 2*	Codemasters	2009
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Dokapon Journey	Atlus	4/09
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Reverie	Square Enix	TBA
Dragon Master	DreamCatcher	4/09
Drama Queens	Majesco	SPR 09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	10/09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	2009
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	6/09
GI Joe	Electronic Arts	SUM 09
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	Rockstar	Q2 09
Guitar Hero Modern Hits	Activision	2009
The Hardy Boys: Treasure on the Tracks	Sega	SPR 09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Harvest Moon Frantic Farming	Natsume	5/09
Hot 'n' Cold	Majesco	2009
The Humans	Deep Silver	4/09
I Love Beauty: Hollywood Superstar Makeover	City Interactive	Q2 09
Infinite Space	Sega	2009
Jagged Alliance	Empire	4/09
Jake Hunter Detective Story: Memories of the Past	Aksys	Q2 09
Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days	Square Enix	2009
Knights in the Nightmare	Atlus	6/09
Last King of Africa	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
LEGO Battles	Warner Bros.	2009
Magician's Quest	Konami	Q1 09
Mario & Luigi RPG 3*	Nintendo	2009
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games	Sega	2009
Mega Man Star Force 3: Black Ace	Capcom	8/09
Mega Man Star Force 3: Red Joker	Capcom	8/09
Mini Ninjas	Eidos	FALL 09
Monsters Racers	Koei	2009
MySims Racing	Electronic Arts	2009
Naruto Shippuden: Ninja Council 4	Tomy	SUM 09
Overlord Minions	Codemasters	1st Half 09
Personal Trainer: Walking	Nintendo	2009
Pet Vet Down Under	Deep Silver	TBA
Phantasy Star 0	Sega	FALL 09
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Puffins: Island Adventure	Majesco	4/09
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	4/09
Roogoo Attack!	SouthPeak	4/09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Sands of Destruction	Sega	SUM 09
Scribblenauts	TBA	Q4 09
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor	Atlus	SUM 09
Steal Princess	Atlus	4/09
Super Robot Taisen OG Saga: Endless Frontier	Atlus	4/09
Sushi Academy	City Interactive	Q2 09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	Activision	2009
Treasure World	Aspyr	Q2 09
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
A Witch's Tale	NIS America	2009
X-Men Origins: Wolverine	Activision	5/09

RED TEXT = TITLES ADDED THIS MONTH *TENTATIVE TITLE NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE

BITS OF TID

Art Appreciation

EA shifts focus to Wii development.

During a recent conference call, Electronic Arts CEO John Riccitiello commented that his company would dedicate approximately half of its console development to Wii software in the coming year. Combine that with the publisher's renewed emphasis on new properties, and we're definitely digging the new EA.

Business as Usual

Mergers and more at big-name publishers.

There's a lot happening on the business side of the gaming industry. Square Enix is in talks to acquire Eidos, while Namco Bandai is interested in purchasing D3Publisher. Some companies are more fortunate than others; financially troubled Midway recently filed for bankruptcy.

...And Many More

Keep an eye out for these other upcoming games.

From EA, there's Need for Speed Nitro (Wii), Spore Hero (Wii), and G.I. Joe (Wii and DS). Activision has its own licensed game—Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen (Wii and DS)—while Warner Bros. Interactive has LEGO Battles (DS). And Majesco is taking a different tack with games such as Go Play LumberJax (Wii) and Dawn of Heroes (DS).

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— Mark Bozon, IGN.com

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— Official Nintendo UK magazine, Oct. 2008

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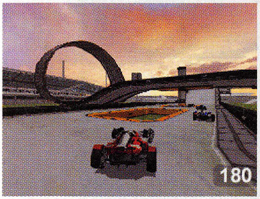

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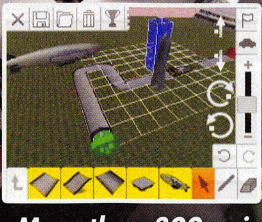

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Wii Channels

Check out a crazy WiiWare game from overseas, then come back home for the latest WiiWare and Virtual Console news, reviews, and info!

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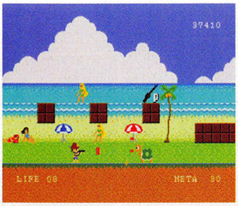
Sega Goes Gaga

The joke's on you in **Pole's Big Adventure**—a very retro and utterly bizarre WiiWare game released recently in Japan.

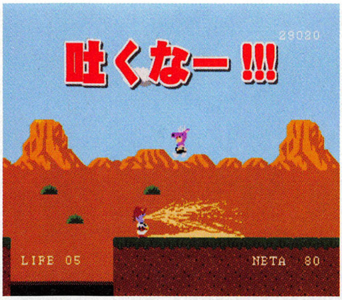
Sega wasn't always a big supporter of Nintendo systems like it is now. Back in the '80s the two companies were huge rivals, as Sega's Master System went head-to-head with the NES for 8-bit dominance. So it's appropriate—or perhaps ironic—that Sega's recent Japanese WiiWare title, Pole's Big Adventure, is a spoof of NES games of yore.

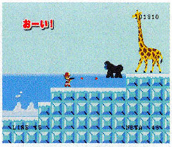
At a glance, Pole's Big Adventure looks like an 8-bit-style action-platformer. Controlling heroic cowboy Pole on a mission to rescue his beloved Sharon from poachers, you'll jump and shoot through six levels with typical motifs, including a jungle, a city, outer space, and, of course, the requisite ice stage, while fighting animal-mask-wearing bad guys and beastly bosses. But there's much more to the game than that.

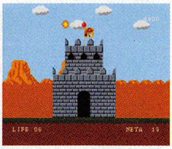
Pole's Big Adventure is what Sega calls a *gagventure*; your goal isn't just to win, but to encounter 100 instances of genre parody and completely random humor. It doesn't take long before you stumble onto Super Mario Bros.-based jokes; you find power-ups in brown-brick blocks, fight turtles that look almost exactly like Koopas, grab mushrooms that make you grow to enormous size, and conclude each level by entering a castle as a flag raises and fireworks explode in the sky. You can even duck into

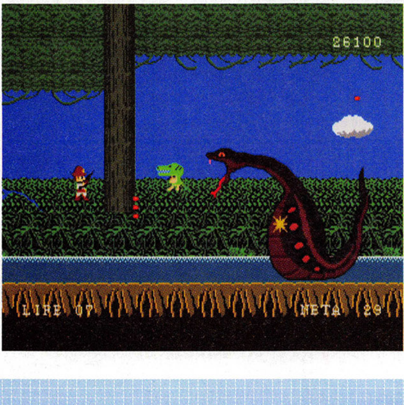


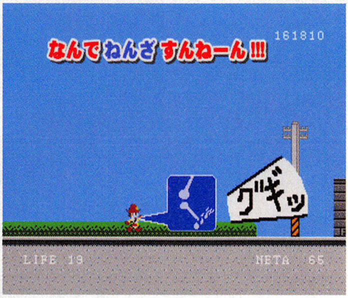
[Above] That turtle sure looks familiar. Don't jump on it; shoot it!
[Right] Never eat too much before going on a platforming adventure.



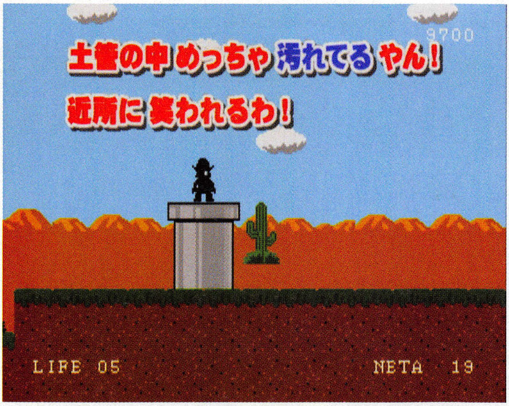




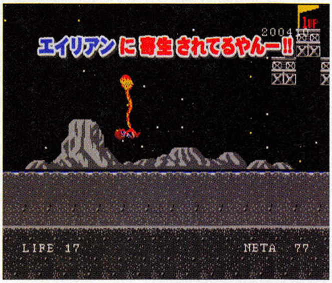




[Above] Old-school game heroes fall from great heights all the time, but Pole's the only one who breaks his leg.


9700
土管の中めっちゃ汚れてるやん！
近所に笑われるわ！
LIFE 05
NETA 19

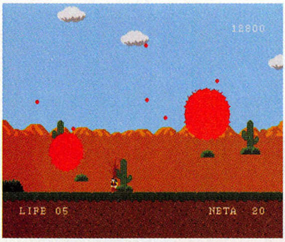
[Above] Not everybody's as lucky as Mario. When Pole goes into a pipe, he doesn't find coins; he comes out covered in sewage. [Below] Beware of aliens in your chest cavity!

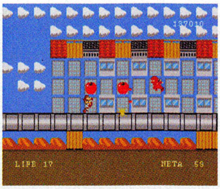

1UP
2004
エイリアンに寄生されてるやん－!!
LIFE 17
NETA 77

a pipe—although instead of warping anywhere, you simply emerge covered in sewage.

Other aspects of the game are equally goofy, particularly several insane one-off moments such as when you ingest a power-up that causes an alien to burst from your chest, get decapitated by a seemingly random background element, or fall from a platform and break your character's leg, causing him to hobble and turn blue. And since the game is presented as if you had just pulled it out of the closet and are playing it on aged hardware, you can look forward to simulated glitches such as slowdown, flicker, and graphical corruption. To top it off, a narrator provides commentary on every wacky occurrence, complete with text overlays (as is common practice on Japanese reality shows).

Sega hasn't commented on whether Pole's Big Adventure will be coming to North America—given its sheer weirdness we'd be surprised if it does—but we guarantee it's unlike anything you've ever played before. **—CHRIS H.**


12800
LIFE 05
NETA 20


137010
LIFE 17
NETA 59

[Above] Yes, these graphics are intentionally messed up.

High school
bites.
Especially
when you're a
vampire.

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The Chronicles of (ism) Vladimir Tod
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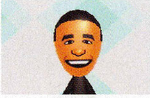
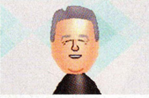
Politically Correct

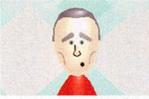
President's Day has come and gone, but we recently stopped by the Check Mii Out Channel to pay our respects to a few politically motivated Miis.



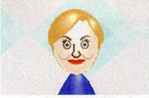
BARACK OBAMA
by Rub



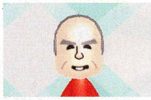
BILL CLINTON
by Maliek



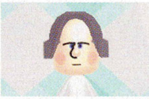
GEORGE W. BUSH
by Chris



HILLARY CLINTON
by St. Patty



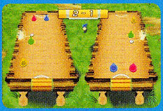
JOHN MCCAIN
by Cameron



GEORGE WASHINGTON
by Einstein

EVALUATION STATION

WiiWare



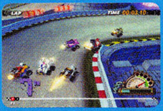
FAMILY GLIDE HOCKEY

PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
Wii POINTS: **500**

This air-hockey sim from the makers of Guilty Gear (yes, seriously) isn't nearly as much fun as the real thing. Front and center is the bizarre choice of control scheme. You move your mallet via the Control Stick and flick the Wii Remote for a quick forward thrust. It feels extremely awkward, and why the developers didn't go with motion controls to mimic the player's movements entirely is beyond me. **—STEVE T.**

Grumble Grumble

WiiWare



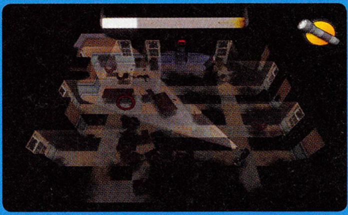
HIGH VOLTAGE HOT ROD SHOW

PUBLISHER: **HIGH VOLTAGE**
GENRE: **RACING**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Not as dangerous or exciting as the name suggests, High Voltage Hot Rod Show is a minicar racer that sometimes feels stuck in the mud. The tracks are winding but wide, and the outrageous vehicles top out at wimpy speeds unless aided by pads, rings, or stunts. That said, a string of boosts does rev up a dull race. Standard tilt-to-steer control with the Remote is solid, but the Nunchuk-and-Remote combo offers more precision. **—GEORGE S.**

Hmmm...

WiiWare



LIT

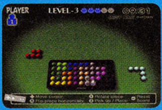
PUBLISHER: **WAYFORWARD** • GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **800**

Justin C's Pick

All I knew about LIT when I started playing was that it's about an emo-looking guy named Jake who's trying to make his way through a darkened school that's teeming with light-fearing monsters. As I soon discovered, figuring out how to get Jake through the series of 30 gloomy classrooms (by turning on lamps or television sets or other light sources, or by using items such as slingshot pellets or cherry bombs to smash windows open) is good fun and results in some satisfying "Eureka!" moments. There's a lot of trial-and-error involved in finding these solutions, however, so patience is a must.

Recommended

WiiWare



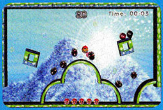
LONPOS

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **800**

LONPOS is essentially a modified version of pentaminos—the puzzle game that inspired Tetris in which you try to fit a set of blocks into a frame. It's simple yet addictively fun, and you get a lot of puzzles for your buck (although the extra DLC doesn't have quite as much value). The controls and game structure could have used some refinement (you can't choose which puzzles to tackle, for example), but this is a solid puzzler nonetheless. **—CHRIS H.**

Recommended

WiiWare



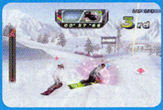
NIKI—ROCK 'N' BALL

PUBLISHER: **BPLUS**
GENRE: **PLATFORMER**
Wii POINTS: **500**

Though Niki—Rock 'n' Ball is a follow-up to Plättchen Twist 'n' Paint, the two games are nothing alike. That's a good thing; Niki is a much better game. Once you get a handle on the physics involved, bouncing through the levels is fairly fun, if unspectacular, and the cerebral aspects of each stage present some unique challenges. The inclusion of both motion-based and traditional controls is much appreciated. **—CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

WiiWare



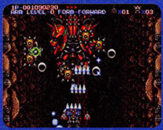
SNOWBOARD RIOT!

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **RACING**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Snowboard Riot! has nice graphics and an Oakley sponsorship, but it feels more like a demo than a full game. It offers only four characters, three modes, and four stages, and it lacks any story or character progression to speak of. The game is a battle racer like Mario Kart, but makes up for its weak AI with frustrating rubber-banding. You can experience everything a game has to offer in 30 minutes, to boot. **—TOM H.**

Grumble Grumble

Virtual Console



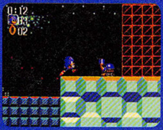
M.U.S.H.A.

PLATFORM: **GENESIS**
PUBLISHER: **NAXAT/SEGA**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1990**

It's pretty amazing that an early Genesis game like M.U.S.H.A. can look so good. The colors are vibrant and the sprites are nicely detailed. The vertically scrolling action is great, too, and there are some nifty power-ups available. As you would expect of a shooter like this, though, M.U.S.H.A. can be very challenging, even on the easiest of the three difficulty levels. **—JUSTIN C.**

Recommended

Virtual Console



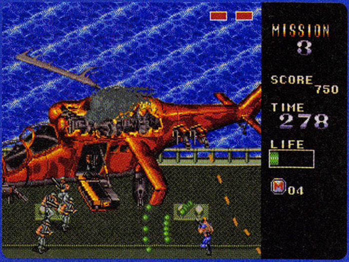
SONIC CHAOS

PLATFORM: MASTER SYSTEM
PUBLISHER: SEGA
GENRE: PLATFORMER
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1993

While playing the original version of Sonic Chaos, I'm willing to bet you could see smoke coming out of the Master System. The impressive animation and backgrounds (for an 8-bit title) were obviously too much for the hardware to handle because the frame rate frequently slows to a crawl. The controls aren't very tight either. This is another historical curiosity; nothing more. **—STEVE T.**

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



WOLF OF THE BATTLEFIELD: MERCS

PLATFORM: GENESIS • PUBLISHER: SEGA/CAPCOM
GENRE: SHOOTER • ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1991

Chris H's Pick

Mercs was one of my favorite shooters back in the day, and even though the Genesis port is single-player (as opposed to the three-player coin-op), it's still an excellent game. Drivable vehicles, hard-hitting power-ups, rockin' music, and impressive bosses are among the highlights. Unless you happen to have a Mercs arcade machine handy, this is well worth your time.

Recommended

Virtual Console

SCORE 0022060
LIFE
GOLD 0035

WONDER BOY IN MONSTER LAND

PLATFORM: MASTER SYSTEM
PUBLISHER: SEGA
GENRE: ADVENTURE
ORIGINAL RELEASE: 1988

Featuring traditional action and platforming combined with a monetary system and equipment upgrades, Wonder Boy in Monster Land was an adventure game that was fun, unique, and packed with secrets. If you didn't have a Master System back in the day, this is worth trying, but be ready for an old-school challenge; a lack of continues can lead to frustration. **—CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

The Cat's out of the Bag

Yuke's commits to downloadable gaming with its new Akinai Games label.

Demonstrating the publisher's commitment to WiiWare, Yuke's Company of America has created offshoot Akinai Games as an umbrella for its current and future downloadable titles. "Downloadable gaming has been gaining in popularity and we're really confident that the trend will continue as the technology and in-game content advances," says the company's CEO, Shane Takahashi. "This presents a great opportunity for us to forge a new path, to make a name for ourselves as a leader in downloadable content in the eyes of the consumer."

Recent WiiWare release Evasive Space (developed by High Voltage Software) was the label's opening salvo. Now the company is looking to publish more games across more genres. "We want to stand out for our ideas, but we're not looking to differentiate ourselves in any one particular area," Takahashi adds. "Limiting ourselves to certain types of projects will limit what is available to the gamer." One common element for the label's WiiWare titles, however, will be strong integration with the console's unique control schemes. "We're exploring possibilities with the Wii Balance Board or even Wii MotionPlus. These peripherals will have us looking into ways of incorporating different play styles like we did with Evasive Space."

The label's name (Japanese for "keep entertained") and logo (depicting a *maneki neko*, the omnipresent lucky cat) suggest that the Japanese influence will continue to be strong as the company moves forward. The fact that Japanese parent Yuke's Company Limited is responsible for developing the critically acclaimed WWE SmackDown vs. Raw games bodes well for future projects. **—GEORGE S.**

AKINAI GAMES™
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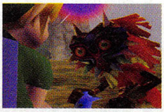
WANTED!

One vote. One measly vote. That was all that kept The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask from tying for first place on the readers' most-wanted Nintendo 64 Virtual Console games list. Though the original Super Smash Bros. won over the readers in the end, the NP crew stuck with Link's trippy solo adventure.

00:55
52%
24%
93%

READERS' MOST WANTED: NINTENDO 64

1. Super Smash Bros.
2. The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask
3. Donkey Kong 64
4. GoldenEye 007
5. Banjo-Kazooie



NP STAFF'S MOST WANTED: NINTENDO 64

1. The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask
2. WWF No Mercy
3. Rayman 2: The Great Escape
4. Ogre Battle 64: Person of Lordly Caliber
5. Rocket: Robot on Wheels

There's a showdown comin'. Next issue we'll find out the overall most-wanted games across all systems currently available on Virtual Console. The following issue we'll reveal the most-wanted RPGs. Send your top five most-wanted **RPGs** to **vcpoll@nintendopower.com** and we'll print the results in the near future. Note: This is for polling purposes only and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

THIS MONTH IN PREVIEWS

DOKAPON JOURNEY PG. 29
EA SPORTS ACTIVE PG. 30
GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS PG. 26
GUILTY GEAR XX ACCENT CORE PLUS PG. 28
KLONOA PG. 22
KNIGHTS IN THE NIGHTMARE PG. 24
OUR HOUSE: PARTY! PG. 32
OVERLORD: DARK LEGEND PG. 30
ROOGOO: TWISTED TOWERS PG. 32
SANDS OF DESTRUCTION PG. 23

Sweet Dreams

>KLONOA

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **KLONOA WORKS** • RELEASE: **MAY 2009**

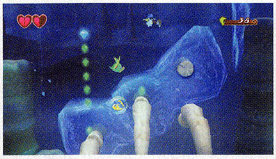
I adore Klonoa. When the original version was released for the PlayStation back in 1998, I was so smitten that we declared a National Klonoa Day on the video game website I headed at the time. We encouraged everyone to take the day off and hunt down a copy of the game. Sadly, none of the country's elected officials had the vision to follow our lead, so it was never legally recognized as a holiday. I can only assume that thousands of people lost their jobs or flunked out of school as a result of the unexcused absence, but I'm sure they agree it was well worth it.

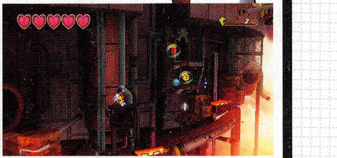
A pure platformer the likes of which we don't see very much these days, Klonoa revolves around a single core mechanic. Called the Wind Bullet, it allows our floppy-eared hero to ensnare an enemy, then fire the evildoer as a projectile or use him to perform a double jump. The game's magic comes from brilliant level designs and the myriad ways they take advantage of this relatively simple gameplay device.

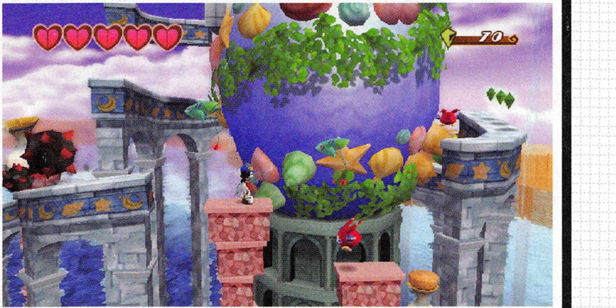
Aside from a few very minor tweaks, the Wii version doesn't muck with the formula. Nor does it fail to retain the original's legendary charm. Klonoa's bright, cheery aesthetic might turn off some older gamers at first glance, but once they play through the first few stages, all but the most heartless will be won over. (Those fiends probably enjoy kicking puppies.) I'm extraordinarily relieved that Namco Bandai abandoned its plans to redesign the titular hero, and though all of the dialogue is now voiced in English, you can restore it to the original Phantomile gibberish in the options menu. Of course, a significant visual makeover means that everything looks much better than it did on PlayStation.

Also new to this remake is a Reverse mode that's unlocked after you beat the game. Not only are all of the stages reversed, but each contains a portal to a challenge room that will test the skills of even the most seasoned Klonoa vets. You can play the game the old-fashioned way via a variety of control options (including the GameCube and Classic controllers), while using the Remote and Nunchuk allows you to hurl enemies with a flick of the wrist.

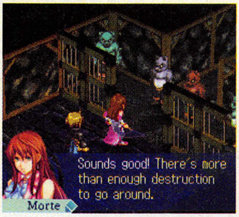
All in all, this looks to be a worthy update to one of gaming's truly wonderful adventures. Be sure to put in your time-off request for National Klonoa Day.
—STEVE T.





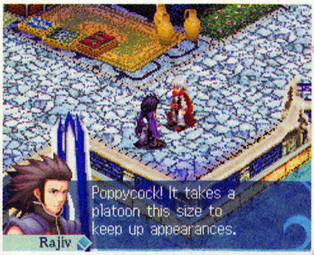


Evil Seadoph & Evil Pamela

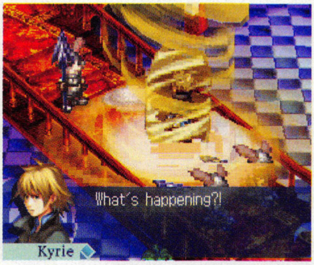

Sounds good! There's more than enough destruction to go around.

Wharf
9,398 G
Menu

I like how this town always buzzes with energy.

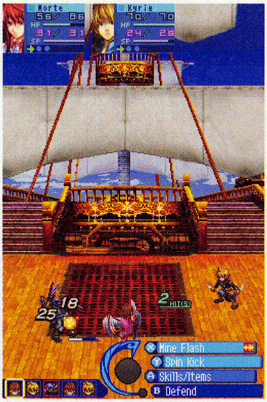

Poppycock! It takes a platoon this size to keep up appearances.

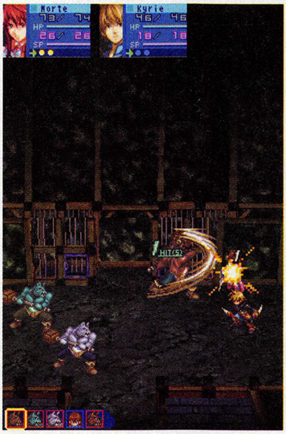
[Above] Only top ferals like Rajiv can get away with saying "poppycock." [Below] Unleashing your destructive sand powers is what's happening, Kyrie.

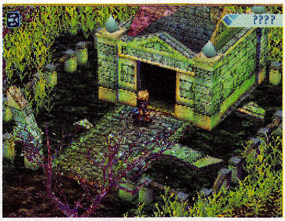

What's happening?!

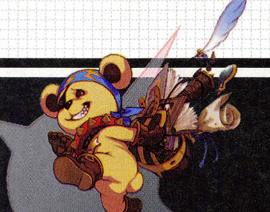
This place really does treat us humans the same as ferals. It's amazing.

[Below] The ship they're fighting on is actually traveling on sand, à la Jabba's sail barge.









The End is Nigh

>SANDS OF DESTRUCTION

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **IMAGEEPOCH** • RELEASE: **SUMMER 2009**

Things are bad for the humans in Sega and ImageEpoch's RPG Sands of Destruction. They're slaves to beast people called ferals, and they inhabit a planet that's covered with barren seas of sand. There are the earthquakes and tsunamis, too. So yeah, being a human is...not so good. Is it any wonder that some people just want to end it all?

To achieve the goal of destroying the world, the appropriately named World Annihilation Front requires the help of a young man named Kyrie. Although he doesn't know how or why, Kyrie has the power to turn everything and everyone into sand (hence the game's title). Guiding him on his quest is World Annihilation Front agent Morte, but the two get some help from other allies, such as freedom fighter Agan and bounty hunter Taupy. Taupy is one of the most interesting of the group—he looks like a teddy bear, but he's a martial-arts expert. Seeing this ostensibly cuddly creature initially threaten Kyrie and Morte (they have bounties on their heads, after all) is quite amusing, especially since Taupy has a deep voice that's incongruous with his appearance. You can hear him and the other characters speak (in English) in either the fully voiced cut-scenes or when they say their Quip. As the story progresses and the characters interact with one another, members of your party will say specific lines of dialogue that become Quips, which you can equip to give your party certain benefits. Taupy, for example, quips, "I'm a professional," which doubles your party's experience after a battle.

Speaking of battles, combat in Sands of Destruction is a bit different than in other RPGs. To fight in the turn-based skirmishes, you can use either Rush or Blow attacks by pressing Y or X, respectively. Rush attacks are weaker but give you a higher combo count, whereas Blow attacks are just the opposite. Of course, you can use skills, too, to help make combat easier. In the Skills/Item menu, you can press X for offensive Blood skills such as Morte's Molotov Cocktail, or push Y for defensive skills such as Kyrie's healing Medicinal Soup. Just make sure you have enough Battle Points (BP), the yellow orbs in your characters' status windows; one BP is consumed for every action you take, though defending or using items will immediately end your turn. These are just the basics, though; you'll have plenty of opportunities to get used to the combat: the game throws a lot of random battles your way. We're hoping the enemy-encounter rate is decreased a tad more before the game's release. **—JUSTIN C.**

Quick on the Draw

>KNIGHTS IN THE NIGHTMARE

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **STING** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

PREVIEW
APRIL '09

Developer Sting describes Knights in the Nightmare as an "active and tactical RPG," which is a massive understatement. It's more than just active—playing it is like trying to survive the kind of bullet-hell shoot-'em-ups Atlus's DoDonPachi made famous. This is a game that will not let you catch your breath for a second.

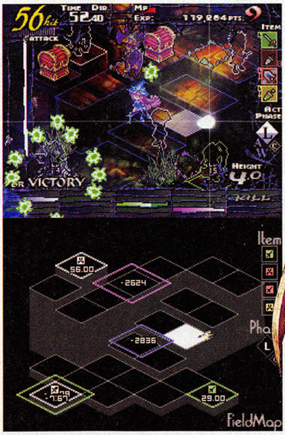
It's a different way to make a hardcore strategy-RPG. Games like, say, Final Fantasy Tactics tend to be about obsessive preparation, planning, and beefing up your troops. The ideal is to win a battle before it even starts. Knights in the Nightmare looks a bit like other strategy-RPGs, and up to a point it plays like them too, but it goes beyond the typical turn-based combat sim with an innovative touch-screen interface. Planning will get you only so far in this game. Quick reflexes are the real key to victory.

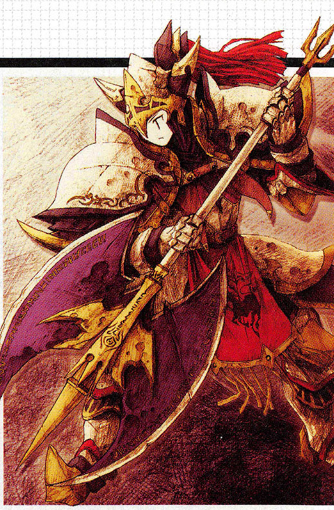
For instance, friendly soldiers attack and defend in real time. By poking and prodding them with a stylus-controlled cursor called the Wisp, you can equip them with weapons and items on the fly, charge up their powers, and potentially wipe out multiple enemies at once with massive special attacks. The Wisp also lets you manipulate the battlefield itself—altering the environment to let soldiers dish out different attacks over different areas—and scoop up bonus items left behind by defeated opponents.

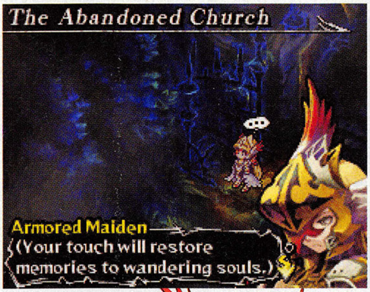
If that doesn't sound twitchy enough, well, the Wisp comes with problems of its own. Throughout a battle, the bad guys can actually shoot at it, and unless you dodge those bullets with some quick stylus moves, the Wisp will run out of the juice it uses to direct and command your troops. (You have only so much time to get the job done.)

This is only scratching the surface of all the game's fiddly little tactical details. The massive tutorial runs through more than 100 different lessons (yes, three digits) in basic and advanced techniques, from snatching new items out of wrecked bits of the environment to laying careful ambushes with precharged attacks. The upshot, though, is that Knights in the Nightmare combines the cerebral depth of a complex strategy game with the immediate intensity of a reflex-driven shooter—two kinds of gameplay that you don't normally see together in an RPG.

The game is very pretty, too, with detailed characters and an atmospheric fantasy world around them, but whether you'll be able to spare enough attention to admire the graphics is an open question. We'll need some more battles to find out for sure; look forward to tales of slashed-up touch screens and shattered styluses in the near future. —DAVID S.



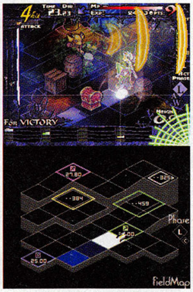


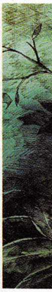


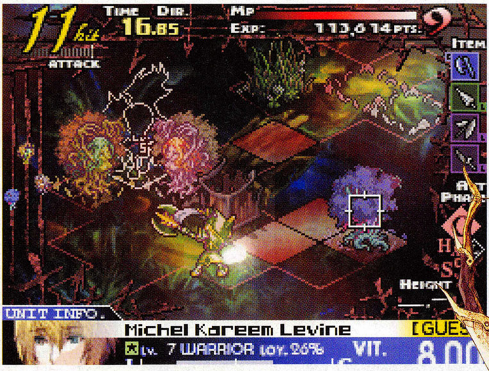
The Abandoned Church

Armored Maiden

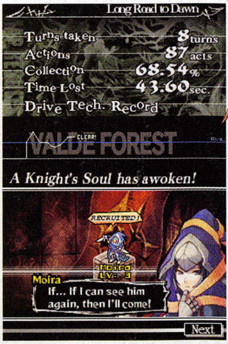
(Your touch will restore memories to wandering souls.)






11 hit
ATTACK
TIME 16.85
DIR.
MP
EXP: 113,614 PTS.
9
ITEM
ACT PHASE
HEIGHT
UNIT INFO.
Michel Kareem Levine
[GUES
Lv. 7 WARRIOR LOY. 26%
VIT.

[Above] Each character class uses a different weapon type. Warriors swing hefty axes.


Long Road to Dawn

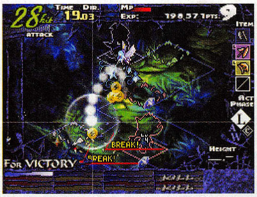
Turns taken 8 turns
Actions 87 acts
Collection 68.54%
Time Lost 43.60 sec.
Drive Tech. Record

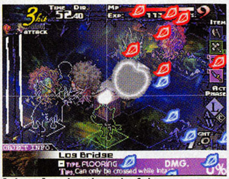
VALDE FOREST

A Knight's Soul has awoken!

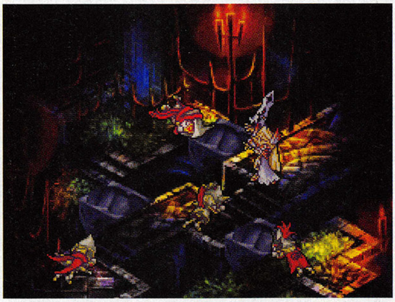
Moira
If... If I can see him again, then I'll come!

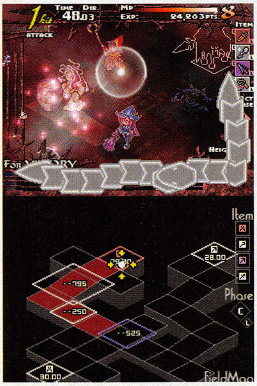
CLEAR!
RECRUITED!
Moira LV. 3
Next


28 hit
ATTACK
TIME 19.03
EXP: 198,571 PTS.
9
ITEM
ACT PHASE
HEIGHT
BREAK!
BREAK!
FOR VICTORY

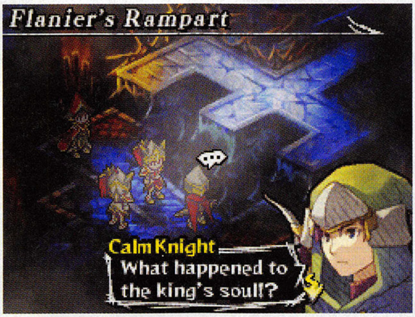

3 hit
TIME 52.40
ITEM
ACT PHASE
OBJECT INFO.
Los Bridge
TYPE. FLOORING
DMG.
Tips Can only be crossed while inta

[Above] Dodge the colorful enemy projectiles like you're playing a shooter.

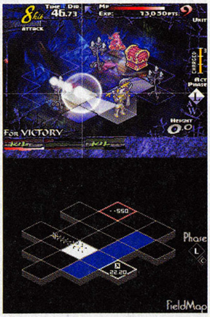


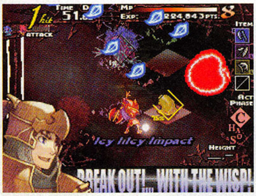

1 hit
ATTACK
TIME 48.03
EXP: 24,263 PTS.
8
ITEM
FOR VICTORY
Item
28.00
795
250
525
30.00
Phase
FieldMap

[Below] Charge up your special attacks to inflict heavy damage on your foes.


Flanier's Rampart

Calm Knight
What happened to the king's soul!?


8 hit
ATTACK
TIME 46.73
EXP: 13,030 PTS.
9
CHARGED
ACT PHASE
HEIGHT 0.0
FOR VICTORY
550
22.20
Phase
FieldMap


1 hit
ATTACK
TIME 51.
EXP: 224,843 PTS.
8
ITEM
ACT PHASE
HEIGHT
Icy Icy Impact
BREAK OUT!... WITH THE WISP!

Leisure-Time Larceny

>GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

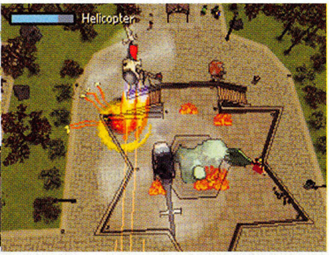
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **ROCKSTAR GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR LEEDS/ROCKSTAR NORTH**
RELEASE: **MARCH 2009**

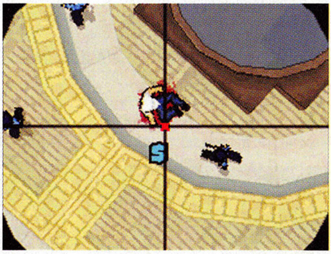
What we had seen of M-rated GTA: Chinatown Wars previously left us impressed with the sheer scope of the game: a full-fledged GTA game and a full-sized Liberty City, wrapped up in a tiny package that you can take anywhere. Rockstar Leeds has done an amazing job adapting the GTA world to the DS, and we knew that the world they created was going to be much bigger than anything ever put on a handheld system before it. Now we've seen specifically how the developers are going to make things work for on-the-go gaming.

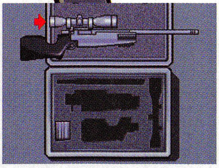
Yes, Chinatown Wars has a deep storyline that you can play for hours, but what about when you've got only 10 minutes to kill on the train? The developers have gone out of their way to make sure you can get a satisfying bite-sized chunk of GTA by adding tons of features for grab-and-go gameplay, including upping the number of odd jobs to do around town, bringing back Rampage mode, and giving you a whole city to run around in and wreak havoc upon. One of the greatest features, though, is something that's never been done in a GTA game before: in your safe house is a magnetic whiteboard upon which there's a picture of every mission-giving NPC you've met, and underneath is a list of all the missions you've completed. Select one of these, and you'll be instantly transported to the beginning of that mission, which you can replay just for fun or for a score that will be recorded in your game. Since you can save anywhere and start in your safe house every time you load up the game (another handy feature), the whiteboard is easily accessible for a quick mission any time you want one.

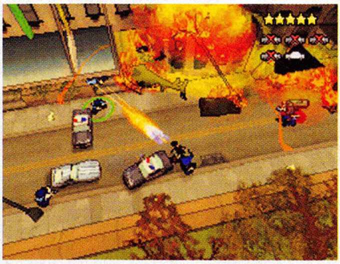
We've also learned more about the game's Wi-Fi connectivity. If you and a pal exchange Friend Codes, you can text each other in real time on your in-game PDAs and trade items and favorite locations you've marked on your GPS, allowing you to access weapons or find secret locations you might not have been able to otherwise. Rockstar will also be running competitions through the Rockstar Social Club, accessible via an in-game PC, so players who get their game-completion percentage up or master a mission have a chance to win prizes.

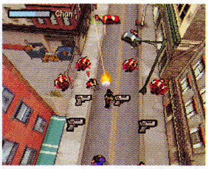
Every time we see GTA: Chinatown Wars, we become more enamored with it. This game could potentially bring portable play to a whole new level, and we can't wait to see the final product. —TOM H.



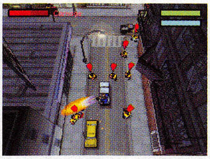


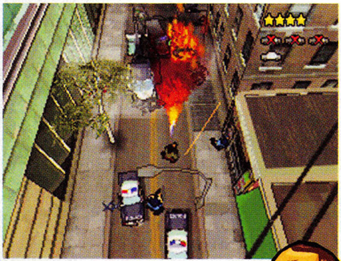


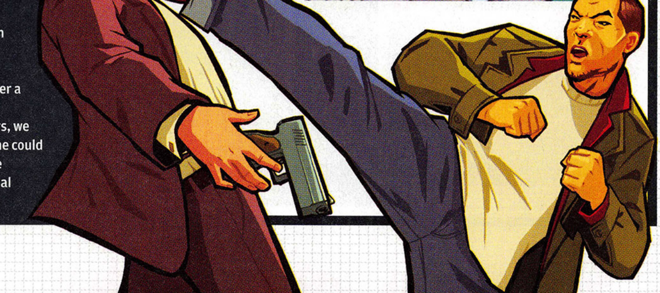




If you don't have time to do a story mission, you can always play around in Liberty City. And by play around, we mean *destroy everything*.







Cultivate this Land...
...then Defend it from Evil.
Rune Factory Frontier
EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol
Wii™

As you tame this new frontier, you may find yourself in the roles of farmer, warrior or savior.

Explore the mystery in the skies above or face dangers lurking in the dungeons below.

A world of choices awaits you.

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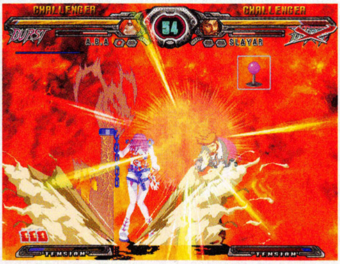
Racked with Guilt

>GUILTY GEAR XX ACCENT CORE PLUS

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **ARC SYSTEM WORKS** • RELEASE: **APRIL 2009**

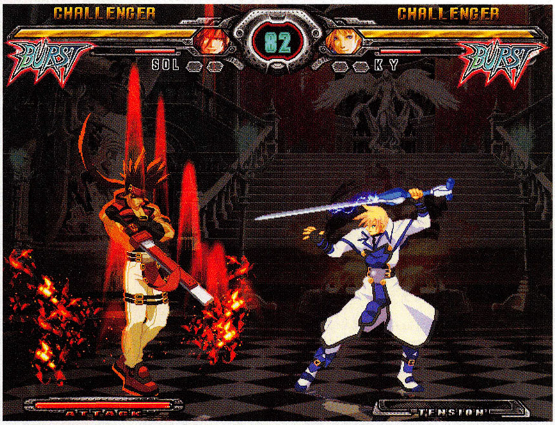
The Guilty Gear series is known for having beautifully drawn, hi-res sprites and deep (perhaps a little *too* deep) gameplay, and Guilty Gear XX Accent Core Plus certainly continues that trend. Of course, just how much does the Plus add to the previously released Accent Core? Well, two characters that were missing from that game—Kliff and Justice—return, filling out the roster nicely to 25 characters in all. Their addition is especially welcome when playing the three-on-three Versus mode. And then there's the Survival mode, in which you can level up your character, RPG-style. But the real incentive for longtime fans is the Story mode, where you'll finally discover just what the heck is going on in the crazy Guilty Gear universe. Gameplay-wise, Accent Core Plus remains pretty much unchanged from the non-Plus iteration, and like its predecessor, supports all manner of play styles. Once again, however, using a Classic or GameCube controller is highly recommended, as playing with the Remote-and-Nunchuk combo (where the attacks are mapped to the Control Pad) feels awkward. **—JUSTIN C.**

PREVIEW
APRIL '09

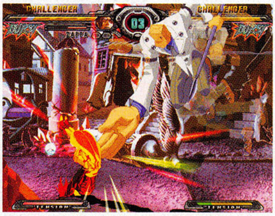

CHALLENGER
CHALLENGER
54
A.B.A
SLAYAR
BURST
TENSION
TENSION

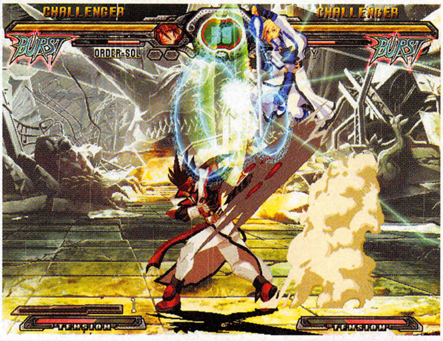
CHALLENGER
CHALLENGER
66
TENSION
TENSION

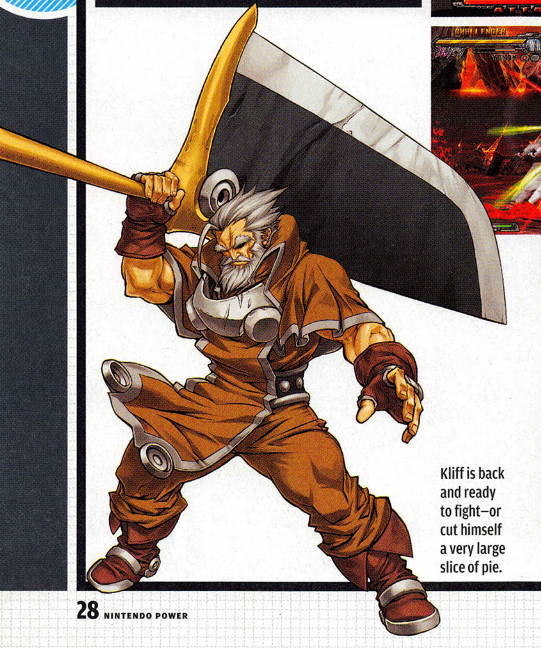
All these flashy visual effects can mean only one of two things: you're kicking somebody's butt or somebody's kicking yours.


CHALLENGER
CHALLENGER
BURST
82
SOL
KY
BURST
ATTACK
TENSION

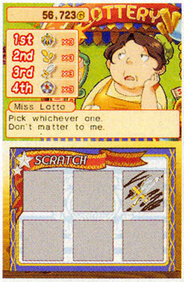
CHALLENGER
CHALLENGER
BURST
89
BURST
TENSION


CHALLENGER
CHALLENGER
BURST
03
ZAPPA
BURST
TENSION

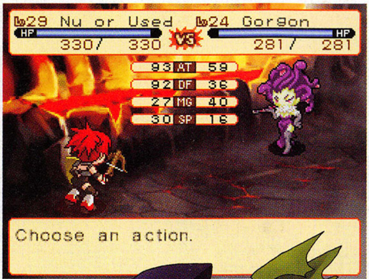

CHALLENGER
CHALLENGER
BURST
ORDER-SOL
BURST
TENSION
TENSION



Kliff is back and ready to fight—or cut himself a very large slice of pie.


56,723G
LOTTERY
1st x3
2nd x3
3rd x3
4th x3
Miss Lotto
SCRATCH

Pick whichever one. Don't matter to me.


Lv29 Nu or Used
Lv24 Gorgon
HP 330/ 330
VS
HP 281/ 281
93 AT 59
92 DF 36
27 MG 40
30 SP 16

Choose an action.

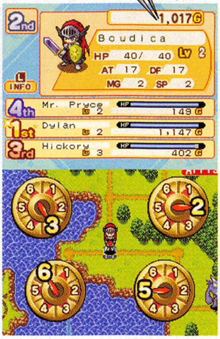
Of Friends and Rivals

>DOKAPON JOURNEY

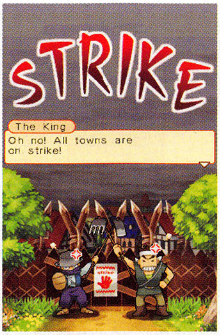
PLATFORM: DS • **PUBLISHER: ATLUS USA**
DEVELOPER: STING • **RELEASE: APRIL 2009**

With its unique RPG-meets-board-game premise, last year's Dokapon Kingdom for Wii was a fantastic, if underrated, gem. Sure, the AI was frustrating in single-player mode, but for a multiplayer experience it was hard to top. Of course, it's not always convenient to have a group of friends over to your place to play Wii, so Atlus's DS follow-up, Dokapon Journey, lets you bring the party with you wherever you go.

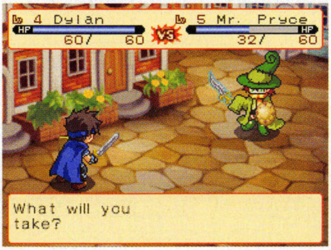
Though multiplayer RPGs aren't particularly rare these days, Dokapon tosses the expected co-op RPG formula out the window. Instead of joining forces, up to four players will find themselves at each other's throats as they travel the kingdom of Dokapon trying to gather the most money, vanquish the most monsters, and ultimately win the hand of the king's daughter. Judging by what we've played, Journey's gameplay is nearly identical to that of its console counterpart, although a redesigned world map and occasional touch-screen minigames provide new challenges for you and your friends—and with both single- and multicard competition supported, it should be easy to rope pals into a game. As with the Wii version, Dokapon might not look hardcore, but it promises to be one of the most fun and most competitive party games out there. —**TOM H.**


2nd
1,017G
Boudica
HP 40/ 40 Lv 2
AT 17 DF 17
MG 2 SP 2
INFO
4th Mr. Pryce Lv 2 HP 149G
1st Dylan Lv 2 HP 1,147G
3rd Hickory Lv 3 HP 402G

[Below] The government has to deal with strikes even in video games. Thanks a bunch, organized labor!


STRIKE
The King
Strike

Oh no! All towns are on strike!


Lv 4 Dylan
HP 60/ 60
VS
Lv 5 Mr. Pryce
HP 32/ 60

What will you take?

EVASIVE SPACE
00:13.58
00:21.17
AKINAI GAMES
WiiWare
DANGER HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE
EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

"We came away impressed..." - IGN

"The next 'diamond' for the Wii's downloadable game service..." - Destructoid

DOWNLOAD IT TODAY!

Mild Fantasy Violence

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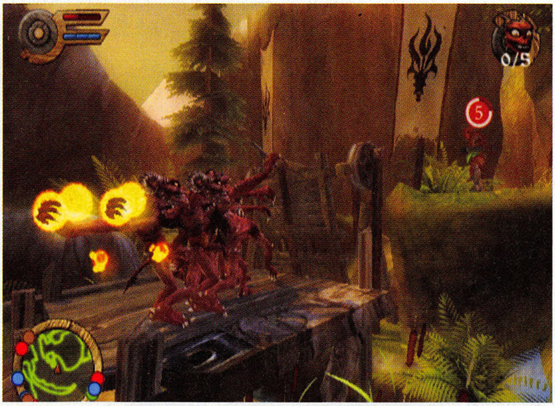
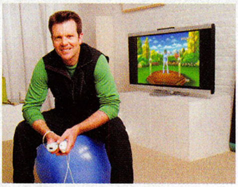
Obey Me!

>OVERLORD: DARK LEGEND

PLATFORM: **Wii** · PUBLISHER: **CODEMASTERS**
DEVELOPER: **CLIMAX STUDIOS** · RELEASE: **2009**

For those of you not familiar with the Overlord series, here's the gist: It's all about being the bad guy and having a blast doing it. You take control of the Overlord and command multicolored minions, each with different abilities, to solve puzzles and defeat enemies—think Pikmin if Olimar looked like Sauron from *The Lord of the Rings*. Built from the ground up for Wii, Dark Legend is a prequel to the original Xbox 360 title, and the developers have gone to great lengths to push the Wii hardware; the visuals are among the best on the system, and you can have up to 25 minions on the screen at once. What we saw of the story and dialogue was both funny and interesting—the game takes your favorite fairytales, such as Little Red Riding Hood, and puts a unique, dark twist on them that should cater especially to the core-gamer audience. Controlling the overlord and minions with the Remote-and-Nunchuk motion controls seems intuitive and responsive, with the Overlord's arm matching your Nunchuk swings pretty accurately. Keep this one on your radar for later this year. —**TOM H.**





[Below] Two leg straps are included so you and a friend or loved one can suffer together.

Game Shape

>EA SPORTS ACTIVE

PLATFORM: **Wii** · PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA** · RELEASE: **MAY 2009**

Though obviously inspired by the mammoth success of Wii Fit, EA Sports Active takes a more Western-style approach to whipping you into shape. Whereas Nintendo's title was informed by an Eastern philosophy of balance and coordination, EA's offering centers on cardiovascular exercise. It also differs from Wii Fit by providing structure to your personal training regimen. A 30-Day Challenge puts together a daily routine based on your goals, and EA collaborated with exercise physiologist (and Oprah advisor) Bob Greene to ensure a solid scientific basis for the program. You can also map your own custom workout with a handy chart that shows you the time and calorie-burning totals as you add activities. Included in the $60 package are two leg straps that hold the Nunchuk to track lower body movements, as well as a resistance band to support a number of upper-body strength-training exercises. Certain activities are also compatible with the Wii Balance Board. There's tons of variety to help keep your workouts fresh, and among all of the lunges and bicep curls, you'll find some fun stuff like boxing, dancing, and inline skating. —**STEVE T.**

"RPGs are in no short supply on the DS, but Suikoden: Tierkreis has all the components to be one of the best."

– Nintendo Power, Jan 2009

Suikoden
スイコデン ティアクライス
TIERKREIS
Nintendo Wi-Fi
NINTENDO DS
Suikoden
TIERKREIS
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Language
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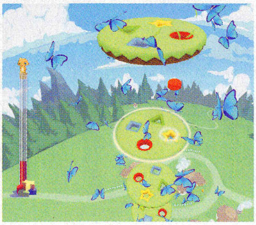
Shape-Shifter

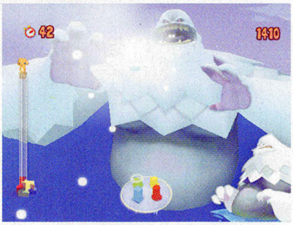
>ROOGOO: TWISTED TOWERS

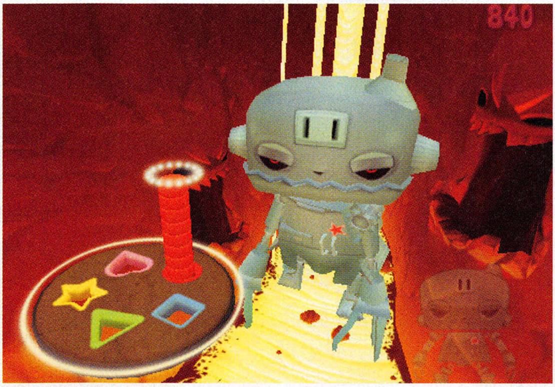
PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **SOUTHPEAK GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **SPIDERMONK** • RELEASE: **APRIL 2009**

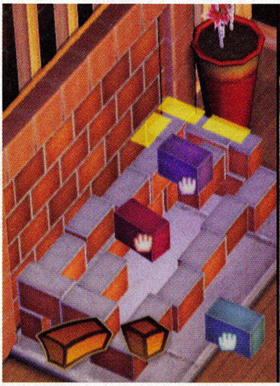
You can't fit a square peg into a round hole. It's upon that most basic piece of knowledge that Roogoo: Twisted Towers is built. As blocks of various shapes fall from the sky, you're tasked with rotating a series of discs so the blocks can pass through the appropriate holes. Easy, right? On the contrary, dear reader. After the first few levels (of more than 100), the action quickly reaches a fevered pitch and new wrinkles are frequently introduced to keep you on your toes. That includes bosses, such as a giant yeti who occasionally ices the screen (forcing you to clear it by waving the Wii Remote) and tries to swat your blocks from the air.

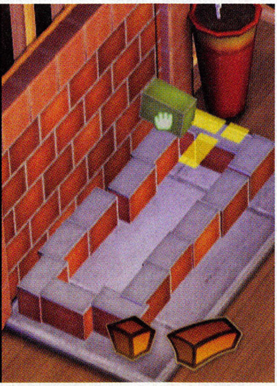
Two players can join forces in story mode, with one in charge of disc rotation while the other handles various support duties (throwing hammers at enemies, for instance). In addition, up to four players can go at it in split-screen races. A DS entry in the series—entitled Roogoo Attack!—is in the works as well, and connecting it to Twisted Towers will unlock additional levels for both versions. **—STEVE T.**



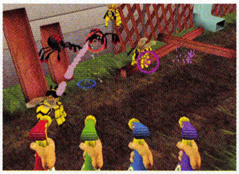


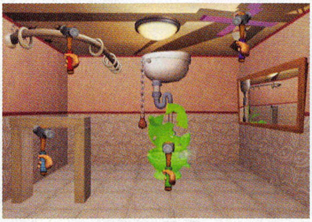






[Right] When your toilet becomes an unsightly green, it's time to remodel.





Tearin' Down the House

>OUR HOUSE: PARTY!

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **BUDCAT CREATIONS** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

Originally conceived as a Cooking Mama-style game with a home-building theme, Our House has gone through some major renovations since it was announced last year. Though the title still lets you play an assortment of minigames to create your own home sweet home, the focus is now on multiplayer action, as evidenced by the addition of *Party!* to the game's name. Up to four players will compete to build the best house through numerous challenges. There are 175 minigames in all, covering everything from racing around the hardware store to get tools, to prepping a kitchen for remodeling by destroying it, to painting walls, mowing the lawn, digging a garden, and rewiring your electrical system—and you'll do it by using the Wii Remote to mimic the motions of an array of tools. You'll be able to select from six house styles—including American, Victorian, Gothic, Asian, and even gingerbread—and show your house off to your friends over WiiConnect24. **—CHRIS H.**

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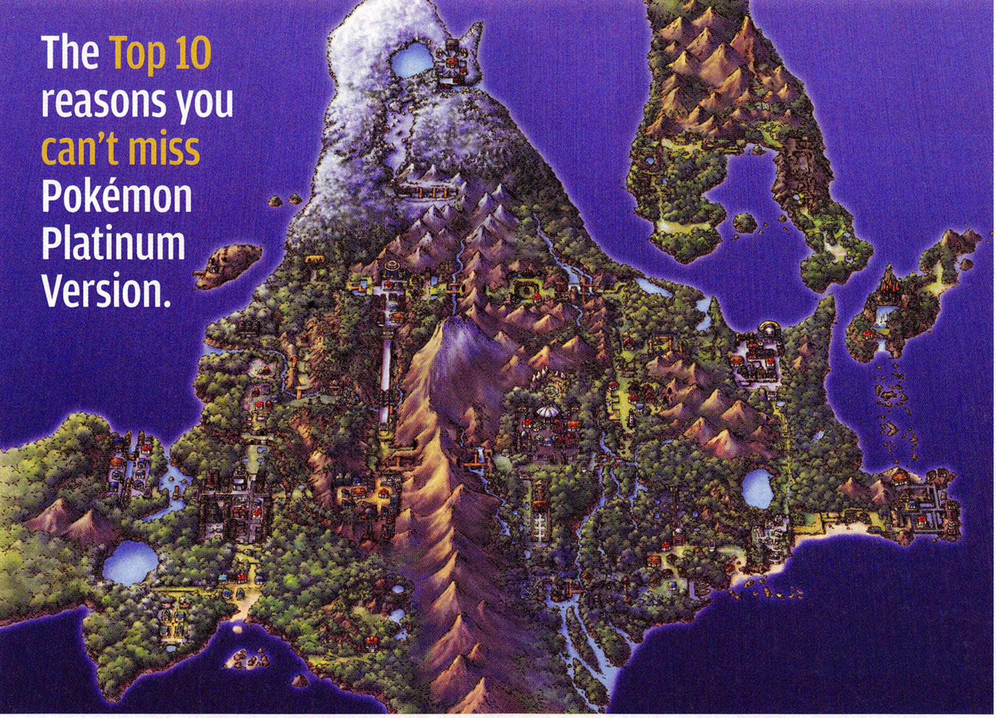
The Top 10 reasons you can't miss Pokémon Platinum Version.



POKÉMON *goes* PLATINUM

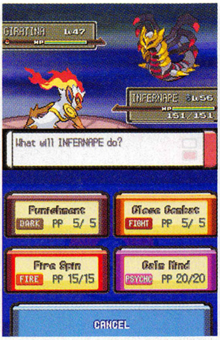
The arrival of any new Pokémon game is newsworthy, but when Pokémon Platinum Version graces the Nintendo DS this March it will be an event. Pokémon fans of every age and level of skill—whether they live to battle or love to collect—will find fulfillment in this Pokémon adventure, the third one based in the Sinnoh region. For Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl Version veterans, the Platinum version will offer familiar experiences but also exciting new twists, plus several entirely new interactive Wi-Fi features. For players who missed Diamond and Pearl, Platinum provides the ultimate excuse to get back into the game. It is bristling with features and challenges. We've dived deep into Pokémon Platinum, and we've put together our top 10 reasons you should go Platinum, too.

BY SCOTT PELLAND

#1

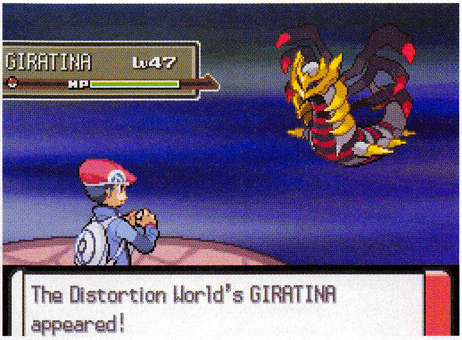
GIRATINA!

Giratina is at the heart of Pokémon Platinum. It is the shadowy Pokémon that leads you into the strange Distortion World beyond Time and Space. This Legendary Pokémon is both a Ghost-type and a Dragon-type and, when you first encounter it in the Distortion World, it will appear in its Origin Forme (with the Levitate Ability that makes it immune to Ground-type attacks). If you manage to catch it, Giratina will revert to its Altered Forme unless you give it a special item to hold. Capturing Giratina will definitely help disrupt Team Galactic's dastardly plot, and Giratina will prove to be a powerful ally in your quest to defeat the Elite Four and the League Champion.


GIRATINA Lv47
HP
INFERNAPE Lv56
HP
151/151

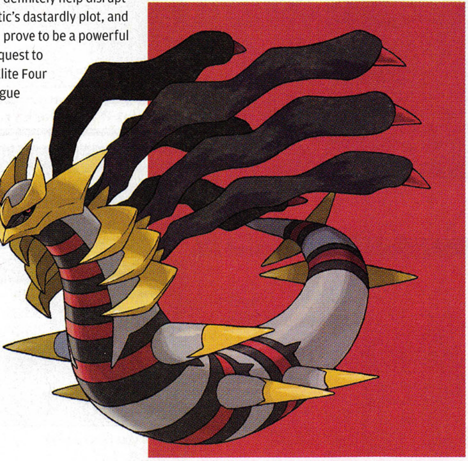
What will INFERNAPE do?

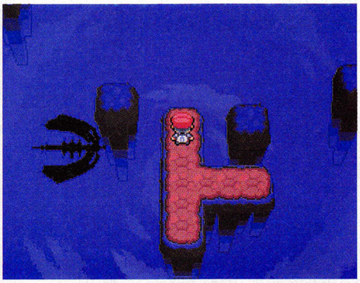
Punishment
DARK PP 5/ 5
Close Combat
FIGHT PP 5/ 5
Fire Spin
FIRE PP 15/15
Calm Mind
PSYCHC PP 20/20
CANCEL

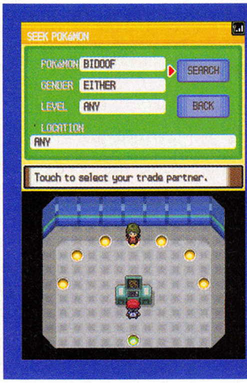

GIRATINA Lv47
HP

The Distortion World's GIRATINA appeared!

Giratina can't exist in the real world of people and Pokémon unless you capture it in the Distortion World, but to do that you'll need to have mastered the many skills of a Pokémon Trainer.

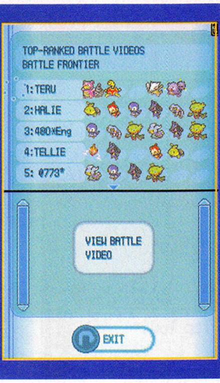





SEEK POKéMON
SEARCH
BACK

POKéMON BIDOOF
GENDER EITHER
LEVEL ANY
LOCATION
ANY

Touch to select your trade partner.


TOP-RANKED BATTLE VIDEOS
BATTLE FRONTIER
1:TERU
2:HALIE
3:480×Eng
4:TELLIE
5: 0773*

VIEW BATTLE VIDEO
EXIT

#2

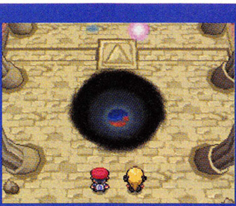
GLOBAL TERMINAL

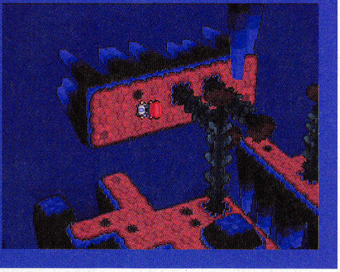
Pokémon Diamond and Pearl introduced Wi-Fi trading across the globe, and Platinum takes this feature to the next level with the Global Terminal taking over the functions of the Global Trade Station. You now have the ability to post and share "videos" of your battles once you obtain the Vs. Recorder. And while offering to trade your selected Pokémon is still a simple matter, now you can receive a notification of a pending trade on your Wii message board. It's a lot easier than having to check in at the Wi-Fi Club desk in Diamond and Pearl.

#3

DISTORTION WORLD

Never before have Trainers faced as bizarre a mystery as Pokémon Platinum's Distortion World—a vast labyrinth that exists in a separate dimension, where the laws of Time and Space don't apply. Only one Pokémon—Giratina—dwells here, but to find it you must turn the world upside down and solve a maze with a few hints from an unexpected source. It's a result of the cosmic plot that has pitted you against Cyrus and Team Galactic.



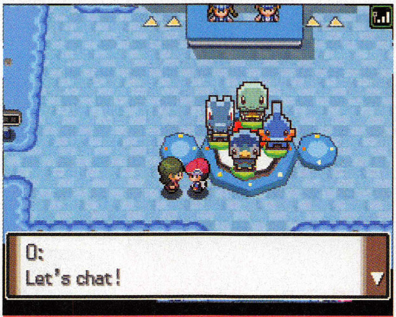


Once you step into the swirling portal and enter the Distortion World in pursuit of the mysterious Giratina, you'll have to get used to walking on walls and ceilings. Solving the area's mysteries requires you to think abstractly and attempt the seemingly impossible.

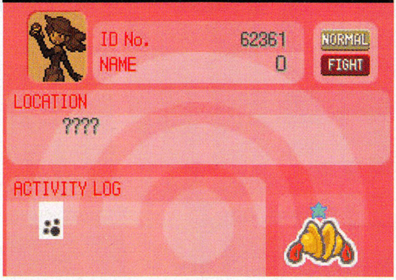
#4

NEW WI-FI PLAZA

If you head downstairs in a Pokémon Center, you'll find the gateway to the new Wi-Fi Plaza and a whole new way to have fun with fellow Pokémon fans. Access to Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection is a must to enter the Plaza, but once you get there you'll find a colorful Pokémon-themed amusement park filled with activities and visitors. As many as 20 Pokémon players from all over the world can congregate, chat, and explore the Plaza's many festivities. You can share Tap Toys, simple touch-screen-activated novelties that are given to Wi-Fi Plaza visitors for their amusement. Other visitors will likely send you a text message asking if they may play with your Tap Toy; don't be shy about saying yes. If you're feeling more competitive, you may wish to challenge others in one of three minigames that accommodate up to four players; they're easy to learn and quick to play, but they're a wonderful diversion from intense battling and team-building. Your Plaza visits have a time limit, and at the end of your stay you'll be treated to a parade.



O:
Let's chat!



ID No. 62361
NAME 0
LOCATION
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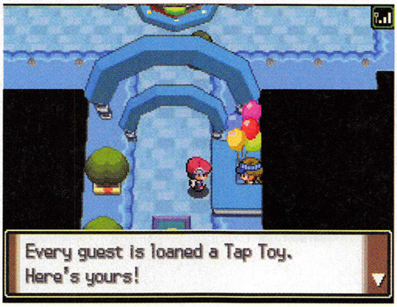
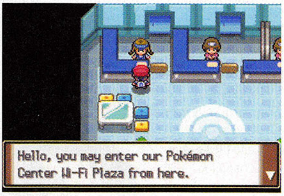
ACTIVITY LOG

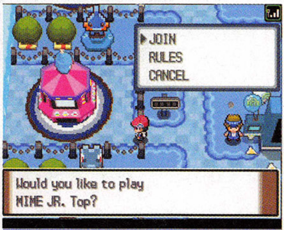


Every guest is loaned a Tap Toy.
Here's yours!



Hello, you may enter our Pokémon Center Wi-Fi Plaza from here.

Embrace the social side of Pokémon in the Wi-Fi Plaza. Chat using preset messages and share Tap Toys with people from around the world, then compete in the three minigames: Mime Jr. Top, Swalot Plop, and Wobbuffet Pop.



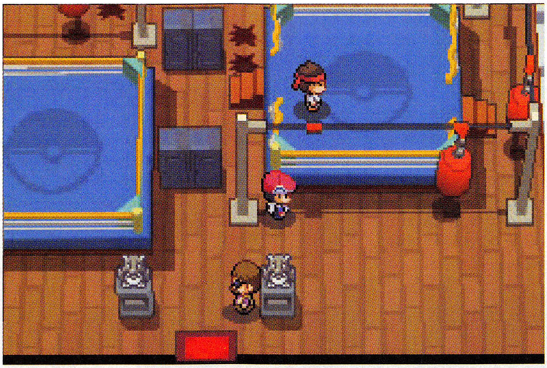
Would you like to play
MIME JR. Top?

X Button: Switch Profile.

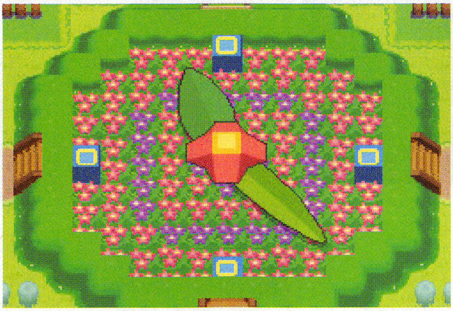
#5

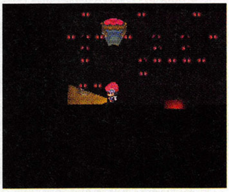
NEW GYM WORKOUTS

One of the most significant changes from Pokémon Diamond and Pearl is that a number of gyms have been reworked to provide new challenges in Platinum. At the center of Eterna City Gym you'll find a giant floral clock whose hands you'll walk on to reach the other Trainers and Gym Leader Gardenia. Hearthome City Gym has an engaging new puzzle element: instead of answering questions to determine which door leads to the next room (as in Diamond and Pearl) you'll have to work your way through a maze with a flashlight to match the symbol on a floor tile to one of the exit doors. Only the matching door will lead you to the next room and, eventually, to Gym Leader Fantina. As for Veilstone Gym, it's become a maze of punching bags; you must push the bags along overhead rails to gain access to the other Trainers and Gym Leader Maylene.



Several of the gyms received major facelifts for Pokémon Platinum. The flowery clock that has blossomed in Eterna City Gym is cosmetic, but the changes made to the Hearthome City and Veilstone gyms add to their challenge.



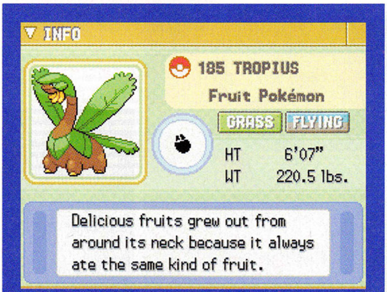


Welcome to the Battle Frontier!

#6

ENDLESS BATTLES

The Battle Frontier concept first experienced in Pokémon Emerald Version appears in an all new form in Pokémon Platinum, offering battle situations and Trainers tough enough to challenge you for a long, long time. The Frontier is open to Trainers who have claimed the title of Pokémon League Champion; a ship docked at Snowpoint City will take you to the northeastern island, where you can participate in the Battle Frontier. Some of the challenges will be familiar, such as the Battle Tower, where you can compete against Hall of Fame teams submitted by other Champions, but other challenges are all-new. What they all share, however, is the ability to test your knowledge and team preparation as a Trainer. In many ways, the Battle Frontier provides the ultimate test, even more strenuous than the battles against the Elite Four and the Pokémon Champion.



185 TROPIUS

Fruit Pokémon

HT 6'07"

WT 220.5 lbs.

Delicious fruits grew out from around its neck because it always ate the same kind of fruit.

#8

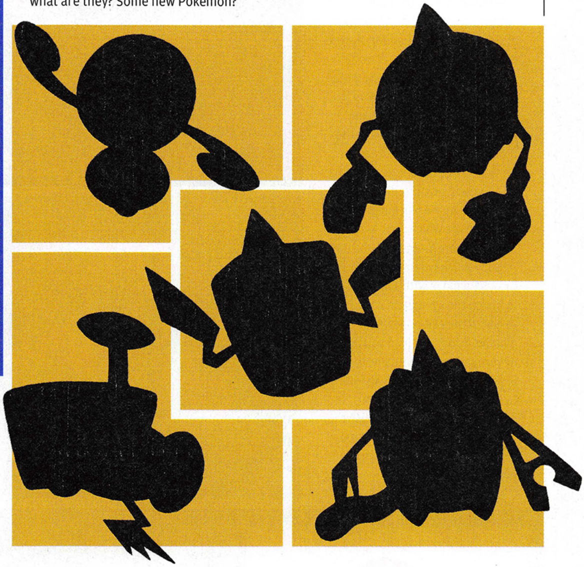
EXPANDED SINNOH POKÉDEX

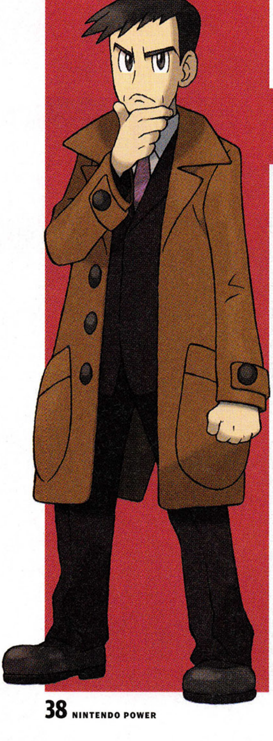
Pokémon Diamond and Pearl each included 151 Pokémon in the Sinnoh Pokédex—that is, you could fill the Sinnoh Pokédex with 151 Pokémon found during the main story of the game. Pokémon Platinum raises that number by more than 50 Pokémon! Trainers will have more team-building options thanks to the greater variety.

#7

MYSTERIOUS SILHOUETTES

All sorts of mysteries are hidden in the Sinnoh region, but one of them is so secret that we can only hint at it before the game is released. The mysterious silhouette images we received from Pokémon's classified vaults may tantalize and taunt, but what are they? Some new Pokémon?

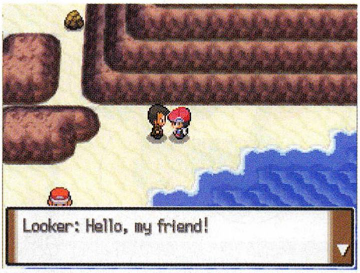




#9

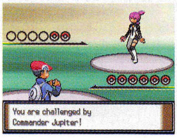
NEW FACES

In Diamond and Pearl, the plot hangs on the appearance of either Dialga or Palkia, but in Platinum a third, mysterious Legendary Pokémon emerges from another dimension, surprising everyone when all hope seems lost—it's a Pokémon Cyrus and Team Galactic weren't counting on. Platinum's revised story includes several new human characters, as well, including one good guy who actively helps you progress and one bad guy who...well, we don't want to give everything away. The helpful chap is known by the code name Looker, which describes him quite well. As you travel around the Sinnoh region, you'll encounter Looker searching for evidence of crimes committed by Team Galactic. Sometimes he'll point you in the direction of the next big event and at other times he'll play a more direct role; but in the end, it is you who will end up saving the day while Looker defers to your battling prowess. Pokémon Diamond and Pearl players take note: Platinum's storyline varies in both big and small ways from what happened in the previous two games. Additionally, the Platinum version is great at directing players to where they need to go and it presents a very clear narrative. It is the *definitive* version.

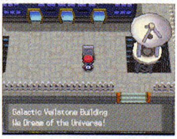


Looker: Hello, my friend!

New faces and old appear in Pokémon Platinum. Looker—a member of the International Police—won't rest until you've brought Team Galactic to justice. Even familiar faces may appear in new places, keeping the experience fresh for Pokémon Diamond and Pearl veterans.



You are challenged by Commander Jupiter!



Galactic Veilstone Building We Dream of the Universe!

NINTENDO DS™
The world is ending.
You must create a new one.
AVALON CODE
EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Fantasy Violence
Mild Language
MMV
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Control the strength of your foes and weapons. The Book of Prophecy will record and alter anything in this world. You will use that information to write the story of the new world.

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www.mmvus.com

www.xseedgames.com

#10

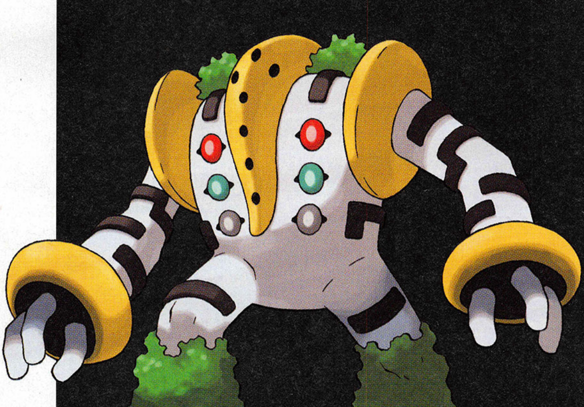
A battle, please!

Already, there is a bond growing between you and that Pokémon.

EVERYTHING YOU'VE ALWAYS LOVED ABOUT POKÉMON!

Maybe the best reason to play Pokémon Platinum is that it is true to the grand tradition of Pokémon RPGs. I've been fortunate enough to play every Pokémon game released over more than 10 years, and I was one of the first people in North America to experience Pokémon before it launched here. What I discovered then holds true today: there is something uniquely compelling about Pokémon's three key activities—catching, training, and battling—because the choices you make, such as nicknaming Pokémon, teaching them moves and giving them items, raising their levels and stats, and directing them in battles, are very personal. No other Trainer will make the exact same choices you do, and you can test your choices against people all over the world.

Pokémon Platinum combines all of these treasured activities with the best presentation and the widest variety of extras ever compiled in a Pokémon game. Beyond the story-driven adventure, you can compete in an assortment of contests in Hearthome City; you can collect every Pokémon and fill out your Pokédex; you can explore the vast Underground; you can trade Pokémon with Trainers around the world or play minigames with them in the new Wi-Fi Plaza. Ten reasons aren't enough to cover all the great aspects and features of Pokémon Platinum, but for Pokémon fans new and old the most compelling reason to play it may be simply that they love Pokémon.



REGIGIGAS IS COMING!

The arrival of Pokémon Platinum is the event of the season for Pokémon fans, but Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl players have even more to celebrate. From March 8th through March 21st, a special Level 100 Regigigas will be available at participating Toys "R" Us stores in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. This Colossal, Normal-type Pokémon has learned the following moves: Iron Head, Rock Slide, Icy Wind, and Crush Grip, and it is holding a Custap Berry. Only one Regigigas is allowed per English language copy of Pokémon Diamond or Pokémon Pearl and you must bring your own Nintendo DS. In February Toys "R" Us distributed the Land Forme of Shaymin, which will have a special surprise for those who trade it into Pokémon Platinum. If Shaymin is in your party when you play through the game and visit Floaroma Town, you'll receive the Gracidea; use the Gracidea on Shaymin and it will turn into the Sky Forme of the Pokémon! Like Shaymin, Regigigas also has surprises in store if you trade it from Diamond or Pearl to Platinum. For further details on how to get your Regigigas at Toys "R" Us, be sure to check out www.pokemon.com. It's definitely worth the trip!

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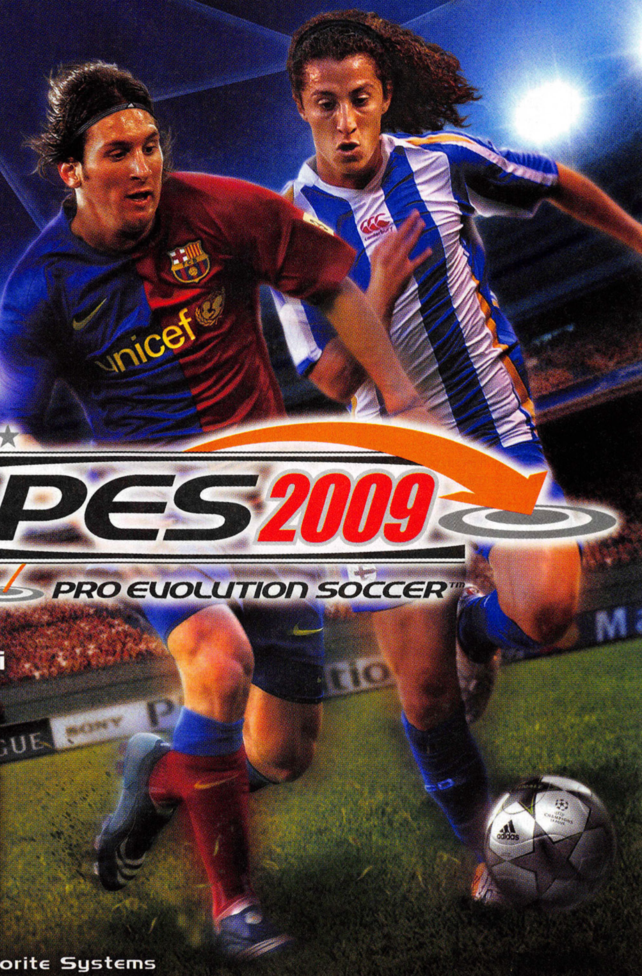

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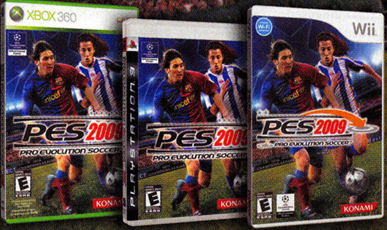

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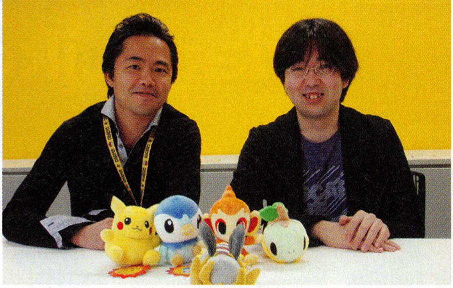
Talking Pokémon

We sat down with the producer of Pokémon Platinum Version, Junichi Masuda (shown left), and Takeshi Kawachimaru, the game's director (right), for the inside story on creating the latest and greatest Pokémon adventure for DS.



How did you get your start working on video games?

MASUDA Ever since the time when games were first in arcades, I was interested in video games and their gameplay mechanism. By the time I was in high school, I went to the arcades on a daily basis. At one point I took an ordinary corporate job, but then I was approached by (Pokémon creator Satoshi) Tajiri to create a game called *Mendel Palace* (NES) and became a game music composer. I was 21 years old then. Because I had created games on PCs since high school and was able to understand the joy of game making, I told him, "I'll gladly be taken into your care" (laughs) and that's when my hobby turned into a career.

KAWACHIMARU My background is similar to Masuda's. I've always loved games since I was little and I also started to go to arcades in high school. One big difference from Masuda is that he grew up in an inner-city area of Yokohama, but I grew up in the country side of Kyushu (including Fukuoka and Nagasaki prefectures). I never had a chance to meet any game developers, and I was about ready to give up and took another job that didn't relate to game development. At that time, there was a convenient online message board called, "PC Communication (PC Tsu-shin)", where I got an opportunity to meet game developers. I saw a posting for a position, so I decided to apply for it as a last chance. I quit the job and moved out to Tokyo and eventually came to work for GAME FREAK (which wasn't called GF at the time). I was 24 years old.

How do people react when they learn that you work on Pokémon games?

MASUDA Kids in elementary school think it's awesome. But middle school and high school students get embarrassed and run away right after shaking my hand (laughs). People close to me tend to say things like "Sounds like a lot of work." They say they have no idea what I am doing, but that I seem busy.

KAWACHIMARU I'm always surrounded by gamers, so everyone thinks it's great. They are usually shocked at first because they think Pokémon is kids' stuff and then they're impressed afterwards when they realize how successful it is.

How did you come to work on the original Pokémon games, and what was your first reaction when you learned of the Pokémon concepts?

MASUDA I developed a program we called "Sound Driver" in order to play music and sound in the games, and also oversaw all the Pokémon voices and other sound effects. Soon after, I started to program the actual game as well. As for the concept, Tajiri asked "what if you could exchange creatures?", and it sounded quite exciting. Back in the day, there were only games where you could battle against each other, so the concept of "trading" was intriguing. At the time, trading was done by a link cable. The idea of transferring a creature through the cable cord was exciting, and it's actually depicted in the game as well.

How did you approach creating music for the series? Did you find that composing for handheld systems was limiting or inspiring?

MASUDA For the Kanto region in the original Red and Green (Red and Blue in the US), I wanted to leave the Asian feel to it. (I'm a Kanto local.) [Note: Kanto is also the name of an area around Tokyo in Japan.] I also had classical music in mind. I felt the music should be unique but not too "orchestra," not too "pop," not too "Asian." I wanted to create a new world by incorporating all the elements of all types of music. As far as portable game devices went back then, you could only use three music scales and a sound effect. It was much more challenging—yet gratifying—to compose music. It was also much quicker to come up with music with these limitations (laughs). Now there are 10 types of music scales! When I tried express the melody I wanted, the music (for a portable game system) couldn't be composed on an instrument like a piano.

I played around with the program in order to add a musical effect to the sound effects—for instance, by removing "static," I could create a unique sound. For example, I would create a shattering sound and make it sound interesting by repeating it several times, without separating all the instruments. I remembered to always come up with music that's unique to video games in general. For this reason, there are many video game scores that can't be written as traditional music notes.

What kinds of music do you enjoy listening to or performing, and have any music styles influenced your work on Pokémon?

MASUDA I usually listen to alternative and techno. I've been listening to import music (mostly from Europe) since middle school, so I hardly listen to Japanese music. I'm a techno lover at heart. I'm into German "drum 'n' bass" types .

KAWACHIMARU When I go over to Masuda's desk, I sometimes can hear "ntsk ntsk ntsk..." (music thumping) from his earphones (laughs). In the office, we share our iTunes music and many songs that Masuda uploads are that kind of music.

MASUDA And I don't really play any instruments. I played trombone in high school, but I gave up on piano. It was impossible (laughs).

As for the style of music that inspires me, people have told me (and I think they are right) that Stravinsky is my favorite classical music composer, and then Shostakovich, Holst, and Ravel. I think some of the sound from these composers can be heard in my music, too. You might especially be able to hear Stravinsky and Holst in the battle scenes. Adding beats or crashing sounds like Stravinsky and Holst is difficult for videogames, though you can still hear their influence in the rhythm.

Mr. Masuda, what was it like to move from music composer to director of Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl?

MASUDA I became sub director for the Gold and Silver versions, and then director from Crystal version on. My perception completely changed, and I started to think about how to make the game more fun. In addition to that, I started to make more decisions. I started to have more conviction in what I expressed. I'm much more affirmative with what I like now, even though I expressed my opinions when I was only in charge of music (laughs). As far as the development goes, I think about the storyline, music, and the rest individually. I think I'm using different parts of my brain for each element.

What do you feel is the main theme, or "spirit," of the Pokémon series, and how did you embody this in both your music compositions and as a director?

MASUDA Overall, I wanted to depict an ideal world, which was peaceful with no environmental issues or racism. The relationship between human beings and Pokémon characters is much closer than the owner-pet relationship, which is what I envision to be the ideal relationship. I want everyone to feel something when interacting with this world. In Japan, people sometimes don't give up their seats for the elderly on a train. I wanted to show a world of kindness. It's not just about what's good and what's bad, I wanted to show that there are even better ways to act than normal. For instance, the Pokémon Celebi is said to only appear when you help nature to flourish in a forest in the Pokémon world. Another example I've imagined is despite the normal reputation that electronics like refrigerators and trucks damage the environment or waste energy, these devices would be something closer to nature in the Pokémon world.

When you first began work on Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl, what were your main goals? What do you think were the key elements to those games?

MASUDA I decided that "ultimate" was the theme in the beginning. I set myself a task to pursue what was the "ultimate" for Pokémon games, and started to act on this theme when making the games. When I asked myself what is "ultimate," I immediately knew I wanted to improve the level of communication, which is a core element of Pokémon games. In the games, players receive the Pokédex and start collecting Pokemon, which you need to do in order to trade with others. At the time of Ruby and Sapphire, people could trade their Pokémon with someone close by, but not with anyone overseas. I really wanted to do something about this. And that's why I came up with the Global Trade Station (GTS). That's what my goal was in the beginning—to create a user network. I want users to be able to connect to the world. That's the ultimate style of trading for Pokémon.

That was the goal. The key element was to create the storyline around the Pokémon in Sinnoh mythology. The relationship between all these Pokémon is the key element. I wanted to express the importance of the balance between substance (Dialga, the ruler of Time, and Palkia, the ruler of Space) and spirit (Uxie, Mesprit, Azelf). If the substance becomes too large, the balance of the spirit collapses. I wanted Dialga and Palkia to become counterparts for a sense of balance. Infinite time and infinite space—that to me is the "ultimate".

As the series progresses, how do you manage to keep the games accessible to new users while also appealing to core Pokémon fans?

MASUDA As an RPG, the beginning of the game is designed for new users so it's easy for anyone to understand and play. At the same time, it attracts our core fans because although it may seem random, the battle system has deep elements due to the complex parameters for battling.

We care most about the new user. Will they understand how to step out of the house? So, a message appears as you approach the steps, and the shape of the dirt in front of your house is indented to indicate that you are supposed to walk into it. Messages automatically appear as you approach signs. Things that fans are already familiar with can be confusing to the new users, so we need to make sure that the game is inclusive for everyone.

KAWACHIMARU One of the key ideas that I value is the sense of "play control" in the game. Through the game screens and game buttons, I pay attention to how I can feel that I'm doing something in the Pokémon world. It should be instinctive. It should show how easily you can get into the game. If you are a huge Pokémon fan, you'll be willing to get into the world more and more, so I think that's where the hook is. So for example, when you stored your Pokémon in the PC in the Ruby and Sapphire versions, we wanted to make it so that you could literally pull out your Pokémon and store them in a box, thinking that it would help by visualizing your Pokémon being organized in a box.

MASUDA I reboot my mind for every single game. I get back in touch with the elementary school student mentality, and I realize I can't carry on with any complex gameplay anymore. It's really important to remember how it feels to be a new user.

Thanks to the Wi-Fi capabilities introduced in Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl, an amazing community has sprung up around those games. Has anything surprised you with regards to how players use the online functionality?

MASUDA The result is as we planned.

KAWACHIMARU As we expected (laughs).

MASUDA You know the GTS site? I thought it was incredible when I saw people in Finland and Northern Europe trading Pokémon on the site. If you go to Europe, you may not see people actually playing the game in the public. But on the internet, you know for sure that people in Europe are actually interacting and exchanging Pokémon. I find that awesome. That's why I really want it to evolve more. I will make it happen! (Laughs)!

KAWACHIMARU I think things are going in the direction I want them to.

MASUDA I was really worried whether people were actually going to use it.

KAWACHIMARU Posting Pokémon for free (on the GTS) was a risky concept. At first we thought we should give out something in return for posting. It turns out we didn't even have to bother, as a lot of people ended up posting their Pokémon on the GTS. I was pleasantly surprised by that.

Do you ever have time to compete online yourself? If so, which Pokémon do you use?

MASUDA Yes, I have. With Dialga or Palkia just like everyone else. I think I had the three starter Pokémon. I can't remember the opponent's name unfortunately. Mostly, I battle while developing the game.

KAWACHIMARU I too play a lot during the game development.

MASUDA I'm fully focused when I'm battling. After that, I go back to my natural state and feel at ease.

KAWACHIMARU I play with my colleagues mostly since I battle like crazy while we are developing.

Pokémon Platinum appears to add some significant new features. What new aspects of the game do you think are the most exciting?

KAWACHIMARU What's most exciting is the new Battle Video feature. This is a function I personally wanted. I've always wanted to know how other people play the games, because my blood burns with excitement when I watch that. Other than that, the Battle Frontier, which was also in Emerald, is something I focused on. It's significant in that two players can play at the facilities. The Pokémon series has been around for more than 10 years, so the first generation of fans is starting to become parents. It's becoming common for parents to play Pokémon with their children, so we included the feature for children and their fathers or mothers to pair up and challenge the Battle Frontier as a team. When I actually tested it out, it was a lot more entertaining than I thought... There are so many other elements I want to talk about (laughs). The Distortion World was tough to create. It's visually radical, too.

Are there new battle aspects to Pokémon Platinum that top competitive players should be sure to take note of?

KAWACHIMARU You now can challenge the Battle Frontier and try to achieve new heights. The Battle Frontier was in Emerald but this one is different with new rules. I want everyone to play in Platinum and try to break the Battle Tower record. I think Battle Frontier is the final destination after all.

Did you have the ideas for Pokémon Platinum in mind while working on Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl, or did they come about later?

MASUDA While developing Diamond and Pearl. Giratina originally embodied the idea of an "antiworld," which is a paradox of Time and Space. It exists in relation to Dialga and Palkia. That's what I had in mind when I was developing Diamond and Pearl.

KAWACHIMARU I was not aware of any of that during the Diamond and Pearl development. Masuda told me about it when we started developing Platinum. So it was after Diamond and Pearl for me (laughs). I normally receive key terms from Masuda in the first stage of development, but there were many random terms like "anti-matter" and "e=mc2," "Reversed Mt. Fuji" ("Sakasa Fuji") and so on. He explained that "Sakasa Fuji" is the reflection of Mt Fuji on the lake, and it's the antimatter world. It was challenging to put that concept to the game, so we did extensive research. I didn't know what exactly "antimatter" was either. I personally think I comprehend it well, but I wonder....

MASUDA Yes. It exists but it actually doesn't. It doesn't exist but it does. That sort of thing. The mountain exists on the lake through human eyes, but it's only a reflection and doesn't exist. It's a diverse world. You see it only because you are looking at it with your eyes. I'm impressed (with Kawachimaru) for being able to take ingredients that were not substantial and incorporate them into Platinum.

With so many passionate fans to please with each new installment, does the development team feel a lot of pressure when working on new Pokémon titles?

MASUDA I personally didn't feel any pressure at the time of Ruby and Sapphire. I did with Platinum though. During the Ruby and Sapphire period, Pokémon's popularity had slowed down a little, and people were concerned. I wanted to prove them wrong. Then Ruby and Sapphire was a success so there were higher expectations for Platinum. I can only focus on the quality of each individual game and be content with what we accomplish, but you also can't avoid the question about the sales numbers. As a developer, I want more people to play the game, but the more games that are sold, that more concerned I become about whether everyone is playing the game without any problems.

I do wonder if the new users will play a Pokémon game, or if they will buy another game. I don't feel as pressured about the existing fans—I feel as though I simply hand them what we just came up with for them to check out (laughs).

KAWACHIMARU I actually didn't feel pressured at all about creating Platinum or how it would be received. But as I mentioned earlier, I was concerned about whether or not GTS would take off and be utilized. I was confident with what we created but there would have been no point to have GTS unless people actually participated and posted Pokémon. I handle anything related to communication, so the Mystery Gift that was distributed a few months after the release was another pressure I felt. I was uncertain until I confirmed that it was a success. Rather than feeling obligated to entertain people, I was presenting ideas like, "wouldn't it be fun if we make it this way?" I have to be confident in my ideas and that's why I didn't feel as pressured.

MASUDA I occasionally hear film directors say that their fear is that no one will be in line on opening day. I relate to that, and I get concerned if there will be a line on the release date. It's the same for every title release. Basically a million people start to debug the game once it gets sold, so we need to make sure to be ready for any bugs that will be found by the users. I also want to further understand the US and European users, and make it more entertaining for them.

Do you have a favorite Pokémon?

MASUDA Pichu. It's the Pokémon Ken Sugimori came up with when we were trying to figure out who would be the "next" Pikachu, so the character was strategically thought out. It clicked in my mind when Pichu was created and we strategically came up with the idea of the Pichu Bros.

KAWACHIMARU You also like hot new singers who can't sing well but are overly promoted on TV.

MASUDA Yes I do (laughs). The singer actually *has* to sing badly. I like artists with marketing strategies.

KAWACHIMARU I like Bulbasaur. Before I started to work for GAME FREAK, I purchased Pokémon Green Version and I chose it as my starter. It was love at first sight. It's four-legged and stubby. It's the same for dogs. I like Corgis because of their stubby legs.

With any Pokémon game, I imagine that creating new Pokémon character designs must be a long and challenging process. What qualities do the developers look for in new Pokémon while narrowing down the final roster?

MASUDA I look at the type of the character and its overall characteristics—what its appeal is, if it's an endearing character.... I obviously check the features but I feel the ones that convey their habitat and lifestyle are the most appealing. I think it's important that you get a good idea of what type of Pokémon they are without looking them up in the Pokédex. None of the characters initially have names so it's important to be very descriptive to visualize what they are. So with Pikachu it would be, "it's yellow, it has a tail in a shape of lightning bolt, and it's an electric mouse," so it's easy to assume that it will have Electric-type moves; it probably gets struck by lightning. I think about where they live and what they eat. I focus on whether or not the character evokes its lifestyle. If it has a mouth, it probably eats, if it has eyes, it can look at something, if it has a nose, it can smell things. I believe it is important to be able to conjure up an image of creatures that are very close to real ones.

Why do you think that the Pokémon series continues to receive so much fan support and enthusiasm after more than a decade since its introduction?

KAWACHIMARU Perhaps because there is no other game to replace it. There are many games that are similar, but as far as Pokémon goes, I think there is no other game that *could* replace it—there is something about a Pokémon game that uniquely identifies it as a Pokémon game.

MASUDA Because we are so dedicated in developing the game, it's quite deep. And because it's deep, you can look at it in different ways with different perspectives. All the elements, including Pokédex descriptions and Pokémon types, continue to be interesting and fun. Other than that, perhaps it's because you can battle and trade with the next version that comes out that makes it so appealing. They are all connected. For instance you can bring your Pokémon from Diamond and Pearl to Platinum, or you could insert the Ruby and Sapphire cartridges at the dual slot of the DS. I think that type of mechanism is what's appealing

In general terms, what do you think will be the key to ensuring that the Pokémon series continues to excite and engage its millions of fans for years to come?

MASUDA I think it's the core element of Pokémon, which is trading and bringing your Pokémon from previous games to each new one. The feeling of connecting different "generations" and "expansions" (namely compatibility with previous games) is important.

KAWACHIMARU Also, interactions between players using Pokémon as a medium. There was trading (through a link cable) in the beginning, and now we can trade on the Wi-Fi Connection. How much we evolve this trading method is the key.

Finally, is there anything else that you would like to say to our readers about Pokémon Platinum?

MASUDA It's got all the core elements of the Pokémon games—we want everyone to experience an excitement that you never have before.

KAWACHIMARU Check out the new functionality to play with your friends.

Thanks for your time!

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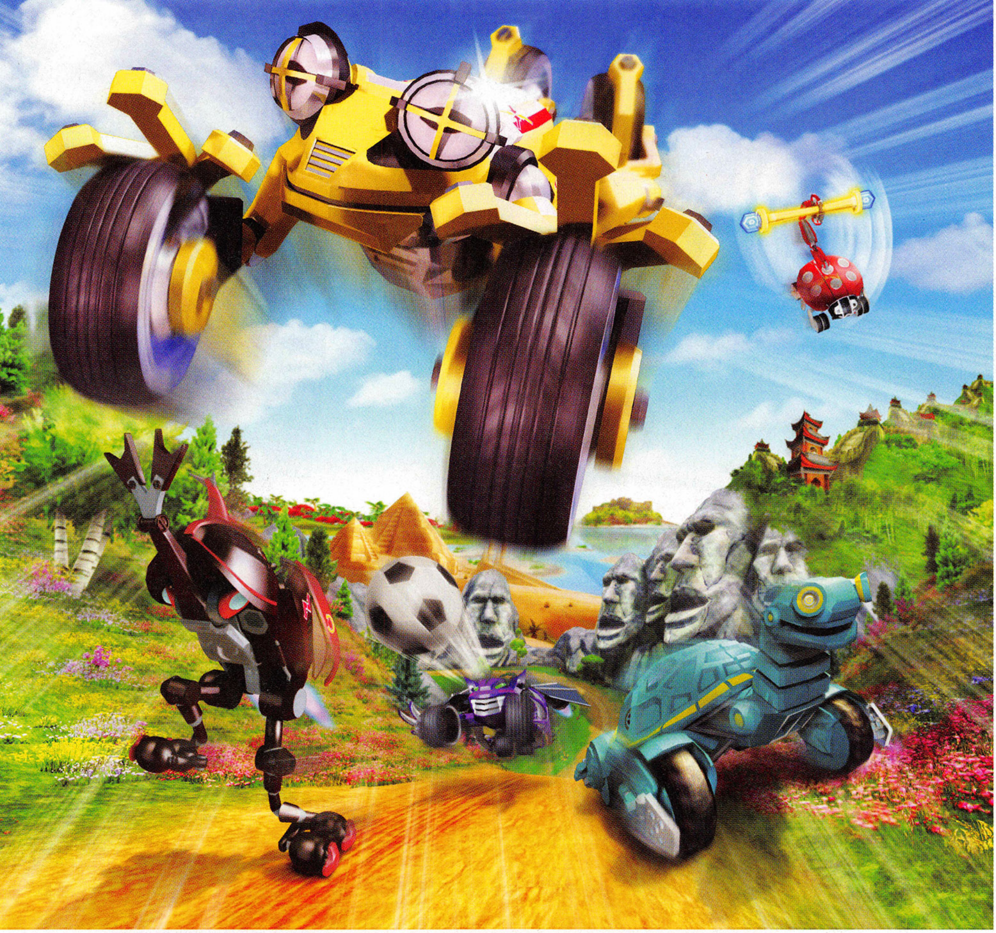
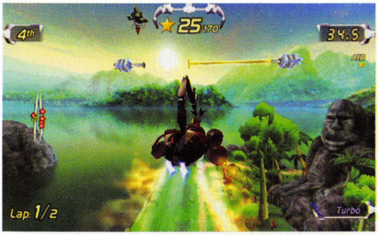


OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

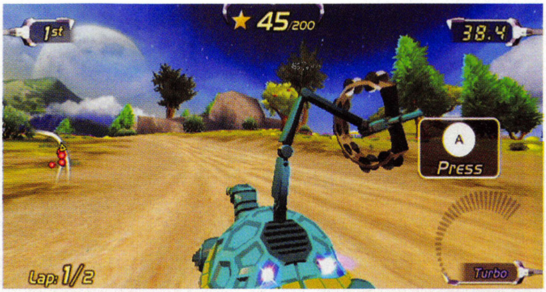
Bowling pins, field goals, pie-throwing, and robotic bugs—Monster Games lets its checkered freak flag fly with its sequel to Excite Truck, Excitebots: Trick Racing.

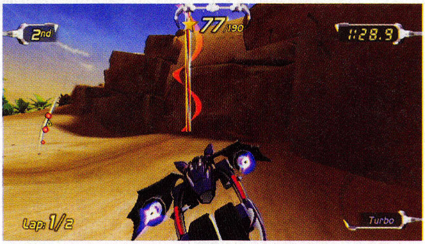
Any surprise involving bugs usually isn't a good one, but Excitebots: Trick Racing—a follow-up to Excite Truck featuring insectlike vehicles—has only just been announced, and it's nearly out! Yep, April will see the return of Excite Truck's turbo-jumping, tree-running, air-spinning madness, with even more features, cool stunts, and what-were-they-thinking craziness than before. We've played the game for several weeks, and we're pleased to report that, as much as we loved 'Truck, 'Bots is set to blow right past it as one of the top arcade-style racers on Wii.

BY CHRIS SLATE



Don't let the crazy bots, spin bars, and tambourines fool you—Excitebots is still all about intense, fast-paced racing.





In the shadow of the overwhelming success of The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess and Wii Sports, Nintendo's Excite Truck (developed by Monster Games) made its mark on the Wii launch by earning a dedicated and die-hard fan base. If you're not a fan yourself, you've probably met one or come across them on online message boards. Excite Truck isn't merely a good game; it's the kind of game that inspires others to sing its praises. We spoke with Hiro Yamada, Supervisor at Nintendo, and Richard Garcia, Team Lead and President of Monster Games, who offered a simple explanation: "Fans love the thrill you get from the mind-blowing combination of attempting crazy stunts while racing at lightning speed. It's an experience that triggers an adrenaline rush that you can't get from any other game." Excite Truck crusaders will be glad to know that everything they loved about the game is back in Excitebots (except for trucks, naturally), and has been taken to a new level.

TRICK RACING

As the game's subtitle implies, the racing action in Excitebots isn't just about finishing in first place. Yamada and Garcia explain: "Excite Truck was the product of our desire to create something that was more than your conventional racing game where the objective is to win first place—something we'd been getting slightly bored of. Of course, the earlier you finish the race, the higher your bonus points will be, so the ideal scenario would still be to finish the race as fast as possible, while at the same time managing to pull off all the stunts. Fast-paced racing combined with insane stunts is what triggers the rush." In both Excite Truck and Excitebots, your overall rank for a race is determined not only by your finishing position, but also by the points earned from stunts. So, very much against the grain, these games make it possible to win without coming in first.

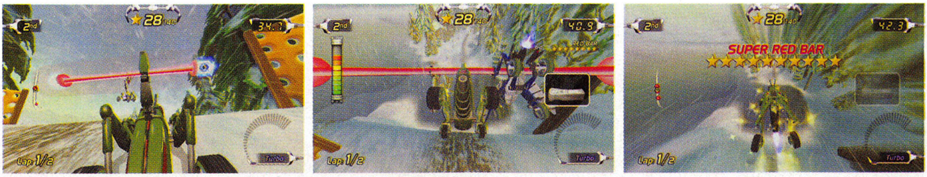
Another hallmark of Excite Truck was the ability to morph straightaways into mammoth ramps, a feature that is back and even wilder in Excitebots. A well-timed boost can send you soaring over a large part of the track in a breathtaking jump. You can rack up points with Air Spins while up in the clouds or by drifting and smashing into other bots back on the ground. All of the courses are off-road and are teeming with multiple paths and shortcuts, so you have a lot of freedom to find your own path around the track.

None of these gameplay elements are impacted by Excitebots's switch from trucks to robot critters, but we've found the change to be a huge improvement nonetheless. The bots add a lot of personality, and their wildly varied designs present a more compelling reason to try out multiple vehicles. With a lineup of insects and animals as diverse as a ladybug, a beetle, a grasshopper, a bat, a frog, a turtle, a mouse, and a mantis, you'll want to try them all out. Of course, each one drives differently due to their varied weights and performance ratings. And with the right in-race power-up, bots can even transform for a short time and run on two legs!

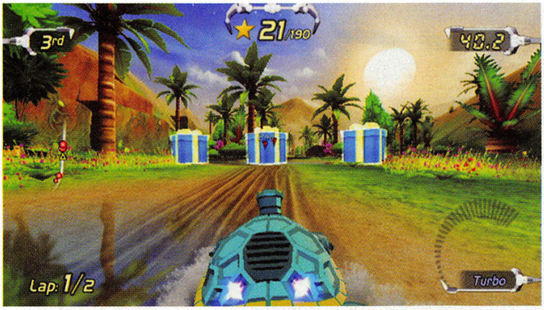
So, we're sold on the bots, but why were trucks dumped in the first place? The developers explain: "The original Excite Truck stood out from the crowd because of the unlikeliness of trying crazy tricks with regular trucks that you might see every day. This time, we're bringing even more insane stunts and tricks. However, when we raced the new tracks with the trucks, we felt that the two elements didn't match up quite as well as we hoped, and we couldn't get immersed in the game like we wanted to. So, we really wanted to create an offbeat, unconventional design that no one would find anywhere else and would fit with the wacky action. That's how we came up with these robot critters."

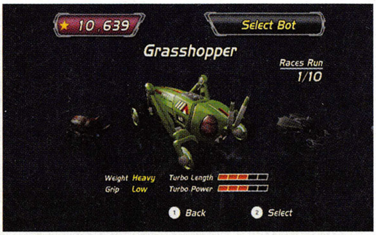
TAKING CONTROL

Of Excite Trucks's many features, best known is its Wii Remote tilt-control steering, which was a revolution when the title launched alongside Wii. This control method is unchanged in Excitebots: you hold the Remote sideways in both hands, with the buttons facing up, and you tilt either side up or down (like a seesaw) to turn left or right. Twisting the Remote toward or away from you lets you angle the bot in midair to land on all four

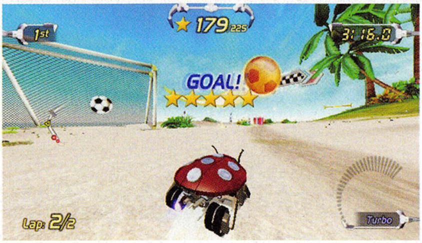


When approaching a bar, your bot will extend a hook to spin around it. On a red bar, you have to match your bot's rotations with the Wii Remote for a big boost.





[Left] Each box holds a different attack item. [Above] Every bot has a unique mix of weight and grip types, turbo length, and turbo power. [Bottom] Soccer during a race? Why not?



wheels, which triggers an instant boost. The 1 Button is the brake (you might as well forget it exists), and 2 is the gas. You can hold down the Control Pad at any time for a continuous boost, but pressing it too long will cause your bot to overheat and temporarily slow down. When a bot touches the power-up that lets it run on two legs, you rapidly tilt the Remote in quick seesaw motions to make it run faster.

Many Mario Kart Wii fans will be glad to know that a second Excitebots control type has been added to take advantage of the Wii Wheel. You won't see much difference in the gameplay using the wheel, but Yamada and Garcia told us, "We've heard that some players find it easier to use the Wii Wheel because they can [easily] grip onto it with both hands. With the Wii Wheel, you can also use the B Button as an additional way to Turbo." Might the game include any other control styles? The developers say no: "Our idea has been to pursue an intuitive control that uses only the tilting function of the Wii Remote, so we aren't planning to support the Nunchuk or the GameCube controller."

Despite the fact that neither control style works very differently than the steering in Excite Truck, players familiar with that game will notice a difference in how the bots handle compared to the trucks. "We wanted to find a way for a wider audience to enjoy mind-boggling action without having to worry about the difficulty of controlling the bots," Yamada and Garcia told us. "When we worked on Excite Truck, we thought that steering the trucks was very easy and that everyone would be able to play the game with ease. But some of our fans thought that it was difficult to control the trucks, or that it took some time to get used to. Based on this feedback, we were able to create something that allowed everyone to experience the same thrill but with even greater control. Overall, controlling the vehicle is much more intuitive and easier to handle, and the tilting and steering of the Wii Remote translates seamlessly to the movements of the vehicle. We also think that the Turbo is more straightforward than in Excite Truck. When we go back and play Excite Truck these days, we are surprised with how challenging it is." During the many hours we've spent playing Excitebots, we've definitely hit fewer trees than we have in Excite Truck, and generally we've felt a little more in control as we've slid around the track. Getting a great rank, however, is still no easy feat.

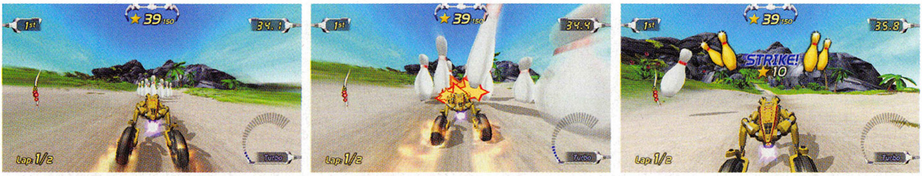
PLENTY OF WAYS TO PLAY

In addition to Excite Race, which is the game's main mode (more on it shortly), Excitebots packs in a wide assortment of Challenge modes (many more than in Excite Truck), which Monster Games wasn't quite ready to announce at press time. Split-screen two-player racing is back, of course, and we *can* reveal that the multiplayer action will go online for the first time. Expect standard six-player races, plus more Wi-Fi features that are still under wraps.

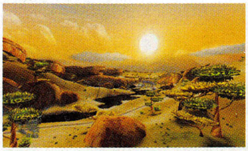
As it was in Excite Truck, Excite Race is the mode you'll spend the most time with, winning races and cups while unlocking new tracks and bots. The School Cup—a series of brief tutorials—must be completed first, and then it's off to the races. As in the Mario Kart and F-Zero titles, a series of tracks (in this case, five) must be completed in each cup (Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum) to advance to the next one. The tracks within a cup can be raced in any order and are considered cleared only when you've finished them with a rank of B or higher.

IN WITH THE NEW

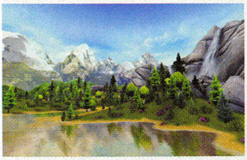
Excitebots boasts quite a few more changes and additions to the Excite formula. There are many brand-new tracks—including new locations such as Egypt and Kilimanjaro— plus returning Excite Truck courses that hold a few new surprises. "Fans may recognize a track and think, 'Oh, it's *that* track,'" teases the developers. "But, of course, each track has new tricks and surprises and you'll be able to enjoy them in a completely new way in Excitebots. Also, all the tracks are more colorful and retro-hip than in Excite Truck."



In-race minigames, such as ramming through bowling pins, are crucial to getting a high score and earning a top rank. Plus they're loads of wacky fun.



The racing action takes place in exotic locales like Kilimanjaro, Egypt, Canada, and China.



Some of the new track additions are special bars that have been placed strategically in every course. As Yamada and Garcia tell us, "There are red bars and yellow bars. Once you reach a yellow bar, your bot grips onto it and instantly spins around at lightning speed, and you need to find the exact time to push your Remote forward so that your bot is released. The sooner you can push and release your bot off the yellow bar, the faster the release acceleration and the more points you earn. But if you push at the wrong time, your bot will tumble off the bar. The yellow bar requires instant concentration while at the same time adding even more speed to the race.

"When your bot reaches a red bar, your bot automatically grabs it and starts to rotate around the bar at a very slow speed. Syncing your Wii Remote movement with your bot on the red bar is critical to increasing the speed of rotation. Spinning around the red bar 10 times releases your bot. [Just before a red bar] you'll be racing at full speed, but once you reach it you'll have to hold back your anticipation to carefully control your Remote, something which ultimately creates an intense change of pace in the gameplay."

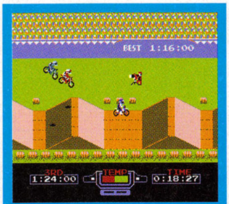
There are also new attack items, such as the Chomper Mouth (a set of fake teeth that chatters away and latches on to the nearest competitor), and over-the-top in-race minigames, of which Yamada and Garcia disclose a few: "Soccer goal kicks, darts, football field goals, and pie throwing are some examples. By successfully playing these minigames during a race, you can earn extra points. In some tracks, when you complete a minigame, it can trigger another surprise such as opening a hidden route."

Expect multiple types of unlockables. "There will be numerous icons that can be unlocked one-by-one and then used for your profile," dishes the developers, "so that your friends and competitors can see the icon of your choosing during tournaments via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. The most exciting is probably the statues since you can collect a statue for each vehicle. By purchasing these unlockable statues, you'll be able to admire your favorite bot from all angles. These new bots, icons, and statues can be purchased by using the stars that you earn throughout the game."

We've also noticed that bots generally don't overheat as fast as trucks did (resulting in even more boost-heavy racing), and that Excite Truck's rock soundtrack has been traded for a score that, while equally energetic, pulls back on the heavy-metal riffs in favor of some quirky techno beats.

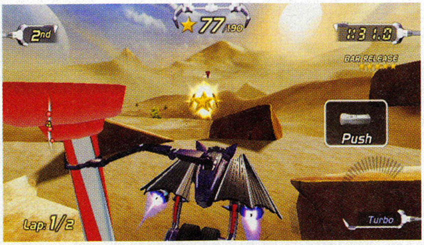
READY TO RACE

Excitebots is fast, thrilling, and completely out of its mind—what other game has you ram through giant bowling pins or knock a big soccer ball into a goal while in the middle of a race? We'll have a full review next issue, but what we've played so far points to this being a noteworthy title, and a must-buy for Excite Truck fans. As the developers put it, "The action will make you want to laugh and call out comments like, 'Are you kidding me?!' and, 'That's just way too ridiculous!'" Who could resist a game like that?

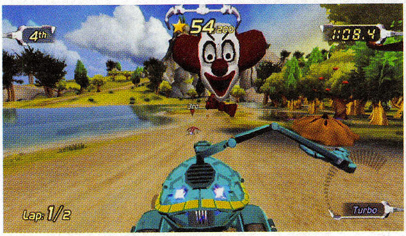


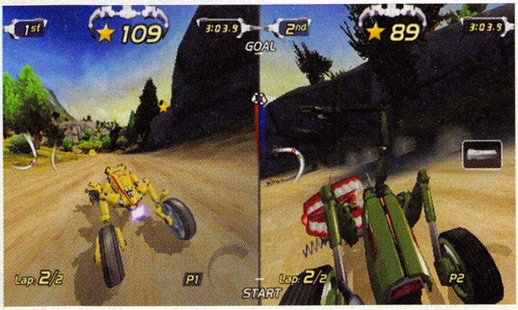
24 EXCITING YEARS

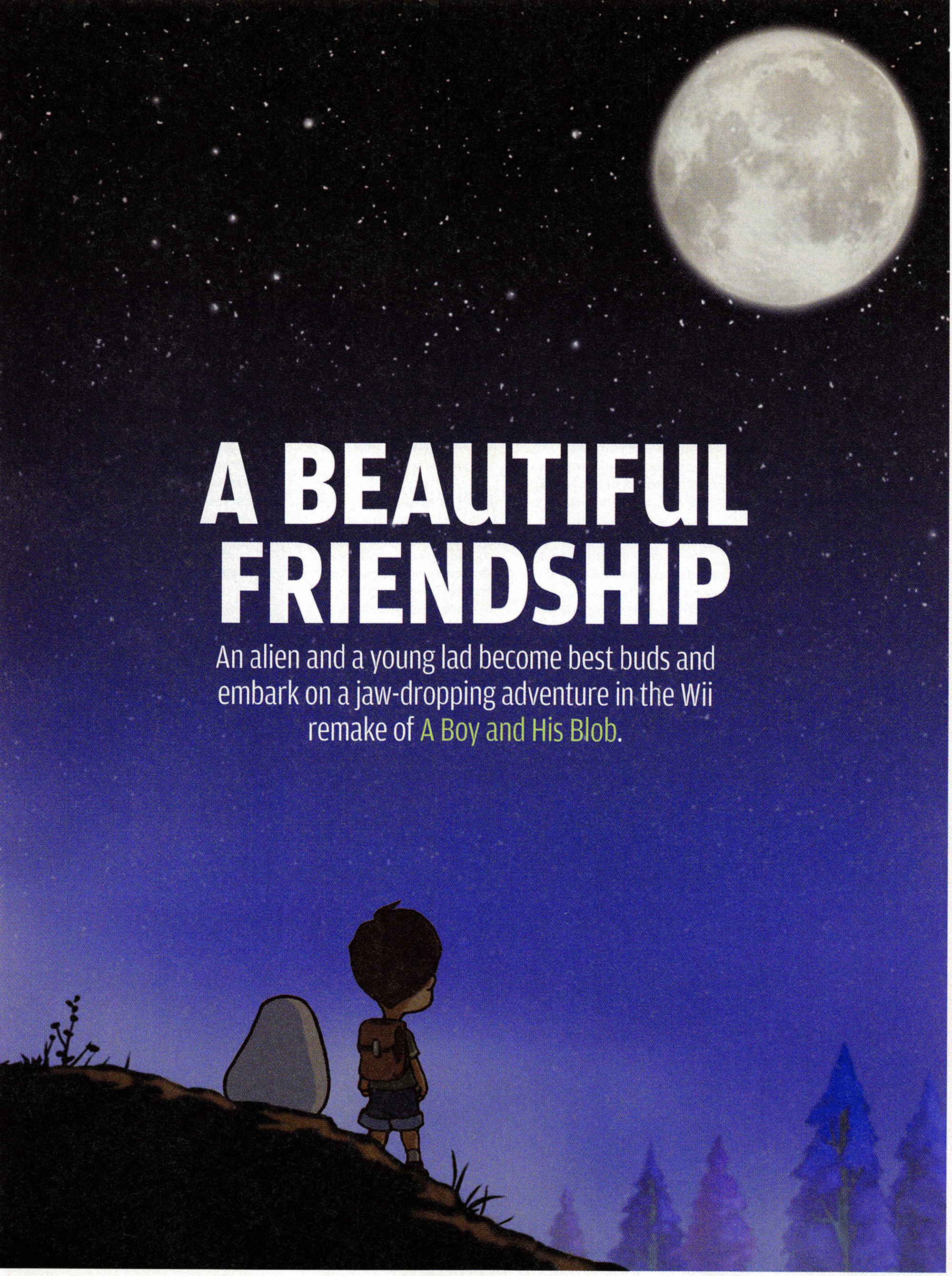
The Excite line of games got its start with NES and arcade versions of the classic Excitebike, which was designed by none other than Mario and Zelda creator Shigeru Miyamoto. The first sequel, Excitebike 64 (developed by Left Field Productions), didn't arrive until 15 years later on Nintendo 64; Monster Games's Excite Truck launched alongside Wii in 2006; and Excitebots hits stores this April. Through almost 25 years, 4 games, and 3 different developers, the Excite brand has always featured highly competitive off-road racing, huge ramps and jumps, and the challenge of sticking a good landing. What could possibly follow bikes, trucks, and bots? Excitecows! We're kidding...we think.



[Bottom] Every game should let you throw pies at clowns.



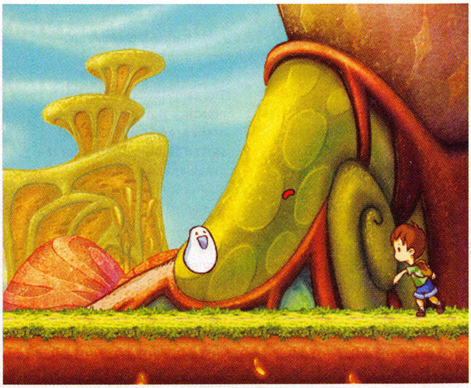


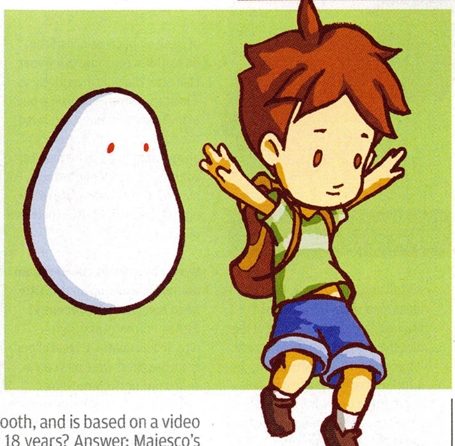


A BEAUTIFUL FRIENDSHIP

An alien and a young lad become best buds and embark on a jaw-dropping adventure in the Wii remake of A Boy and His Blob.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN





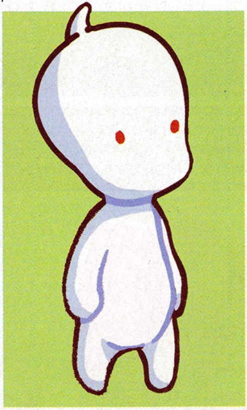
QUESTION: What's visually stunning, has a substantial sweet tooth, and is based on a video game property that hasn't received a new installment in nearly 18 years? Answer: Majesco's A Boy and His Blob for Wii. Designed by Pitfall! creator David Crane, the original A Boy and His Blob hit the NES back in 1990 and earned a cult following thanks to its unique puzzle-adventure gameplay in which players, controlling a boy, would navigate a world by transforming the youth's blob-shaped alien companion into various objects by feeding him jelly beans. Though a Game Boy sequel landed in 1991, the series subsequently went dormant and despite Majesco's intention of reviving the franchise on DS a few years ago, the game was ultimately canned. Now A Boy and His Blob is back and headed to Wii, and with WayForward (makers of Contra 4 on DS) handling development duties, the game looks nothing short of amazing.

Featuring beautiful hand-drawn 2-D backgrounds and characters, and equally gorgeous animation, the new A Boy and His Blob is visally light-years ahead of its 8-bit precursor, but it retains the core mechanics that made the original so compelling. Playing as a boy, you'll again feed various flavors of jelly beans to your blob buddy to transform him into useful objects—such as a cannon, a trampoline, an anvil, a ladder, a bubble, a parachute, a rocket, and a human-shaped doppelganger—that you must use to overcome obstacles and defeat enemies. In the original game, the blob's transformations were mostly for protection or world navigation, but this time out more of them can be used for offensive purposes—dropping an anvil on foes or punching a hole in the ground so enemies fall through it, for example. Another holdover from the original game is the story, as the boy and the blob are once more attempting to free the blob's homeworld of Blobolonia from the grip of an evil emperor.

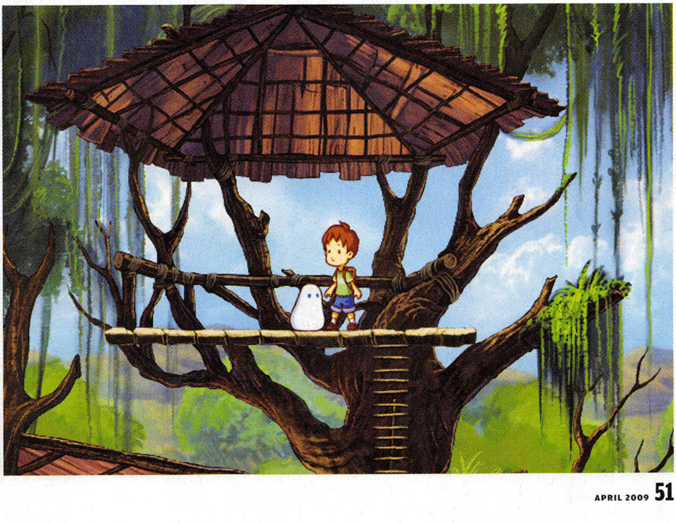
A Boy and His Blob won't make its triumphant return until this fall, but in the meantime we caught up with the team at WayForward so they could fill us in on this very promising title.

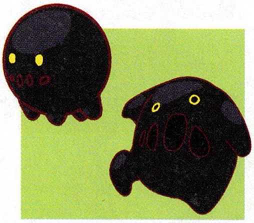
NINTENDO POWER **How did WayForward get involved with A Boy and His Blob?**

SEAN VELASCO, DIRECTOR
It's funny...I'm not exactly sure how the seed was planted! I found



Is it the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man's younger cousin? Nope, it's the blob's doppelganger transformation.





These black blobs may be bad guys, but they're still cute.

myself absent-mindedly brewing ideas for a sequel to the classic original game. In the middle of the day, the boy and blob would creep into my mind and start making a ruckus. I relented and decided to put these ideas into a pitch. WayForward had happened to be talking to Majesco recently, so the stars aligned and the game was begun.

JOHN BECK, WAYFORWARD CEO Majesco has an approach that is really encouraging and receptive to finding out what developers would be passionate to work on. When Sean had the idea for doing this, we were able to approach Majesco right away, and without feeling it would fall on deaf ears. We wish more publishers would take that approach because there is a pretty straight line between developer passion and highly praised games.

Why does WayForward have a passion for this property?

SEAN Like most children of the '80s, I grew up playing NES games. A Boy and His Blob was a breath of fresh air because of its focus on platform puzzling. Using your character mobility inventively as a lock-and-key mechanism is one of my favorite designs, so I loved the concept! Finally, the story of an awkward boy and his magical companion is a classic formula. For our new game, we want to really emphasize the friendship between our characters.

What games have the dev team members working on this title been involved with recently?

SEAN I recently assistant-directed on Contra 4. Most of our team members were on Contra 4, and one or two were major players on LIT. As you can imagine, this game is quite the change of pace from horror-puzzling and alien-shooting.

MARC GOMEZ, ART DIRECTOR Yeah, I worked with Sean before as animation director on Contra 4. Working with the same team helps a lot. We all know where our strengths lie.

How does the new A Boy and His Blob tie in with the original game? Are these supposed to be the same characters? Is it a sequel? A remake?

SEAN This game is sort of a retelling of the original game. The boy and blob are not necessarily the same characters as before, but the situation and transformations are similar. Come to think of it, it's a lot like the Legend of Zelda series in that way. If it's a good enough explanation for Nintendo, then it's good enough for me!

What can you say about the story?

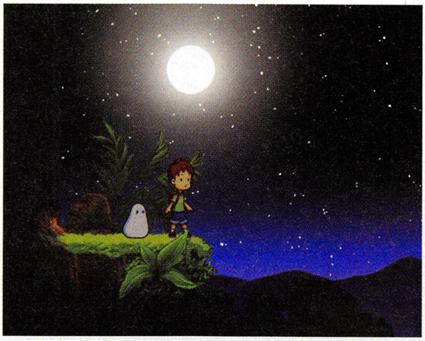
SEAN The blob crashes down to Earth, looking for a hero to help save his home planet, Blobolonia. However, he finds a little boy instead. The two become fast friends and embark on a quest to get back to Blobolonia and overthrow the evil emperor.

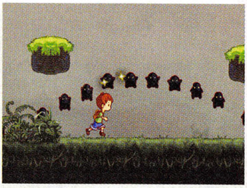
The game looks absolutely amazing. How did you arrive at the graphical style? What served as an inspiration for the graphics and animation?

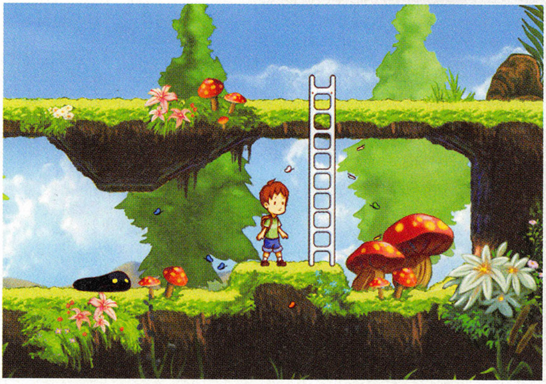
MARC When deciding what look we wanted, we first focused on the mood and emotion we wanted to evoke. We took this inspiration from Miyazaki films, Winnie the Pooh's friendship with Christopher Robin, and *The Iron Giant*. From there we decided the best direction was to go traditional with our animations. We have many experienced traditional animators working with us, so we ramped up quickly.

What was the process like designing the visuals?

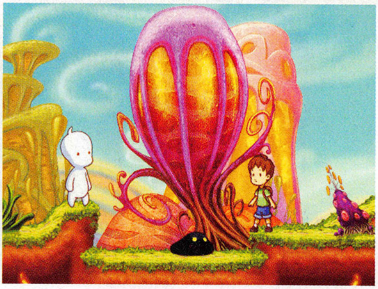
MARC Seeing as how we're working with blobs, I didn't want to give anything too hard of an edge. Everything in the game should feel soft and squeezable. I made the boy much younger than in the original A Boy and His Blob because I felt it helped portray his innocence. Both the boy and the blob should develop emotionally as the story progresses. Enemies

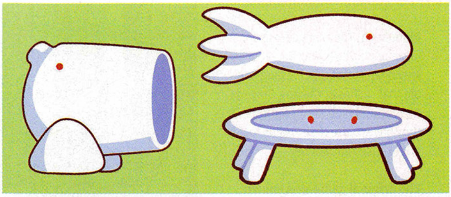






[Left] The phrase "cartoon come to life" has never been more apt. Check out the detailed plants and colorful butterflies. [Below] Crazy purple-and-yellow foliage can mean only one thing: you've landed on Blobolonia.





Move over, Optimus Prime. The blob can turn into many useful forms.

were complex to come up with. Since they are blobs, you're not sure if you want to run from them or hug them. I think they are a good mix of both. Bosses, on the other hand, should be pretty frightful.

Why did you choose to make the game 2-D and not 3-D?

SEAN From the outset, we wanted to make this like an animated movie. We used painterly techniques for the backgrounds, and lovingly hand-animated each frame. At WayForward, we see 2-D and 3-D as equally valid stylistic choices. I think the question to ask is, "Why aren't more games 2-D?"

What sort of approach are you taking with the music and sound?

DANIEL SADOWSKI, COMPOSER For the musical approach, I felt that I wanted to inject many musical ideas into a different, unique sound. First, I felt that the score naturally ended up being a mix of orchestral music, film-score music, Japanese-video-game-influenced music, and a little bit of old retro-sounding music from the days of the old 8-bit scores. Secondly, this is a sentimental story about the relationship between the boy and his blob, so I definitely wanted to add that emotion into the score. Finally, this is also an adventure game, so I tried to put those elements into the game as well.

I have to say that if we were to make another game of this type, I would like to continue this mix of music that I have created, and of course I would love to actually do a lot more music, so that perhaps the score would never loop! This is a composer's dream!

What kind of abilities will the blob have? How will the selection compare to the original game? What sorts of new jelly bean flavors/abilities will be available?

SEAN We have a comparable amount of jelly beans to the original game, some of which have returned from the original. The punch hole lets you drop down to lower areas and can be used as a trap for unsuspecting enemies. The tangerine trampoline will let the boy bounce to ridiculous heights and grab secret goodies. I don't want to give too much away, but we have one transformation that really gets the boy rolling, and another one that has explosive possibilities....

Will there still be ketchup jelly beans? Because those always sounded pretty gross.

SEAN The ketchup bean [which made the blob catch up to the boy in the NES game] has been controversial amongst the staff at WayForward. I'll let programming virtuoso Larry Holdaway take the floor.

LARRY HOLDAWAY, GAMEPLAY PROGRAMMER The ketchup bean always felt like a bit of a cop-out to me. There is a potentially fatal gameplay dilemma created when your toolbox (the blob) can move independently from your hero. It leaves open the possibility of permanently separating the two, thus dead-ending the game for the player. The easy but inelegant solution is to allow the player to warp the toolbox back to the hero. Let's just say that I'm not a fan of easy, inelegant solutions....

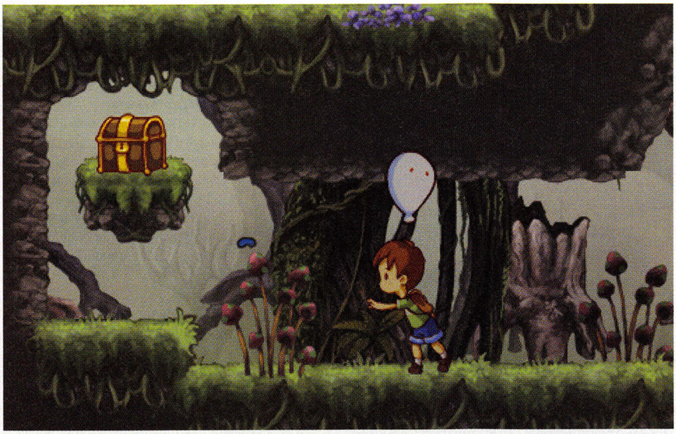
Will the gameplay still revolve entirely around feeding the blob jelly beans and using his abilities or will there be other aspects? Will the boy have any innate abilities of his own?

SEAN The majority of the gameplay involves using the blob to help you. However, the boy will have new abilities like jumping, and tossing beans in a variety of distances and angles.

What sort of challenges will the characters have to overcome?

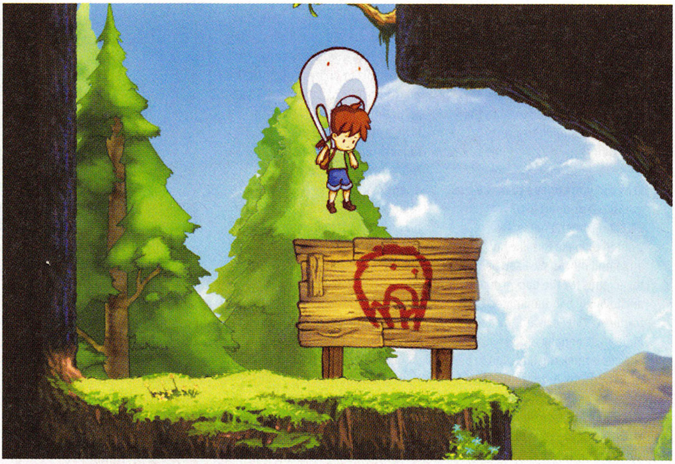
SEAN First of all, the player will have to contend with the environment! Pits of brambles, long drops, crumbling precipices, and wind that blows the boy around are just a few of the obstacles you'll face.

Also, the emperor's minions are everywhere on Earth and



[Above] Like in the original NES game, the Wii version of A Boy and His Blob is full of treasures to discover and collect.

Blobolonia. They range from a mischievous bird who eats your jelly beans to a bull-charging baddie that rushes at the boy. Since the boy and blob aren't fighters, they have to use their brains to get out of sticky situations.



The original game was known for being very short if you knew what you were doing. How big is this game in comparison? What kinds of environments will you be exploring?

SEAN Our game has more than 10 times as much ground to cover as the original game! However, the new game is broken into a level structure so the player can play a level, then put it down and return later. There is tons of hidden treasure to find and secrets to unlock, so you'll be playing for a long time.

Throughout the adventure, the boy and blob travel from the natural beauty of Earth to the bizarre landscapes of Blobolonia. They will see forests, caves, and alien terrain; and they will witness firsthand the destruction that the Blobolonian emperor has wrought.

A while ago when I spoke with Adam Tierney (director of WayForward's LIT), he mentioned that one of his favorite classic games was Flashback, and that game has some similarities to A Boy and His Blob. Was that an influence on pursuing this title and the direction you're going with it?

SEAN Actually, one of my favorite games of that type is Out of This World, which was a sort of precursor to Flashback. We didn't take inspiration from either title in particular, but our game shares the same meticulous attention to lush and believable environments.

Why did you want to bring this title to Wii and not, say, DS?

SEAN Different versions were discussed, but we settled on Wii because the game could be so much bigger! That isn't to say you should totally discount the possibility of the boy and blob appearing elsewhere....

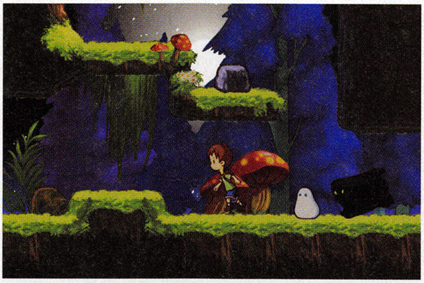
How will the controls work on Wii?

SEAN The game is played with the Wii Remote and Nunchuk. We aren't using any motion or IR control, so the game can also be played using the Classic controller.

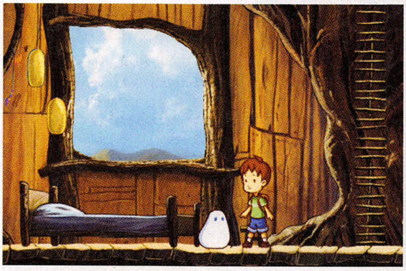
The original NES game, though generally applauded, has received a mixed reaction throughout the years. How will this game be more accessible to all types of gamers?

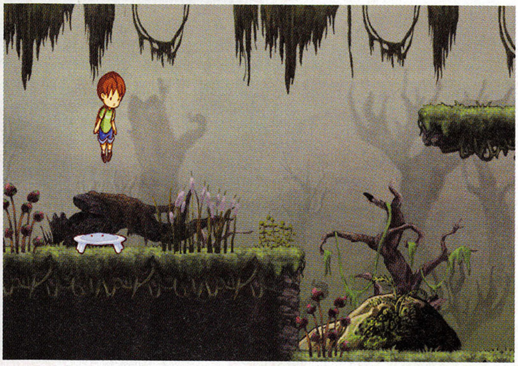
SEAN The first game, even though it is a great concept, suffers from floaty control and confusing objectives. Our game will ease players into the game by introducing jelly beans slowly and carefully designing levels to make sure they are intuitive and silky-smooth.

In what other ways are you reinventing the property for a



[Below] There's nothing more relaxing after a jelly-bean feast than a good nap.





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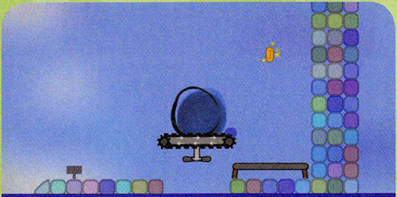
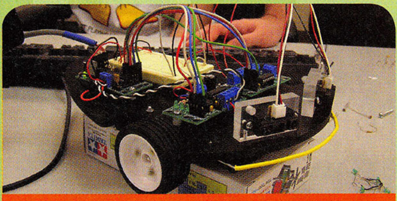
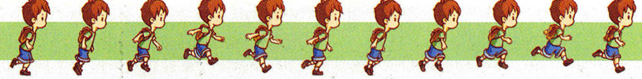
3D ANIMATION



GAME DESIGN



ROBOTICS



new generation of players and hardware?

SEAN This game is, at its core, a story of friendship. We've taken pains to make sure that the boy and blob are lovable. Also, we have tried to eliminate stifling gameplay conventions like menus, tutorials, and excessive hand-holding. Lastly, please pay special attention to the lighting in this game! The lighting was created especially for A Boy and His Blob and we are very proud of the atmosphere it lends to our levels.

MARC I think the new look has a broader appeal and along with other titles, hopefully we can bring back 2-D art to this new generation of gaming. These are exciting times for 2-D art, with the ability to display at higher resolutions and less color restrictions. You are only limited by your imagination.

What's your favorite jelly-bean flavor/ability in the game? What about your favorite jelly-bean flavor in real life?

SEAN I can't tell you my favorite transformation because it's still a secret! In real life, I like them all except licorice.

LARRY I think my favorite is plum, but I won't tell you what it does. Sean, you can give me all of your licorice ones.

MARC I had a whole bag of buttered-popcorn-flavored ones in the Reagan Library once. I got sick.

Any chance that we'll see the NES game included as a bonus?

SEAN If I answered every question in this interview fully, there would be no secrets left to reveal....

WayForward revitalized the Contra franchise, and now you're working on this. What is it about revisiting classic franchises that appeals to you?

SEAN Ask yourself: Isn't it amazing to play a classic game and revisit the worlds that you experienced in your youth? Now imagine you had a chance to add to these worlds and craft them for a new generation of players!

That being said, we are always cooking up ideas for amazing new games at WayForward. Hopefully, we can continue to reboot classic franchises and create awesome new original games.

Is working with these classic franchises something you'd like to do more of?

SEAN I'm glad you asked. I would love to have the reins of EVO: Search for Eden, Metroid, Mega Man, or Ninja Five-O.

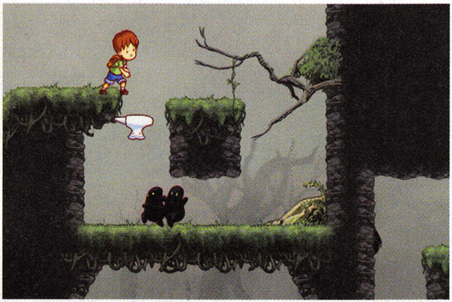
MARC I personally would like to do River City Ransom. Adam wants to do Dig Dug.

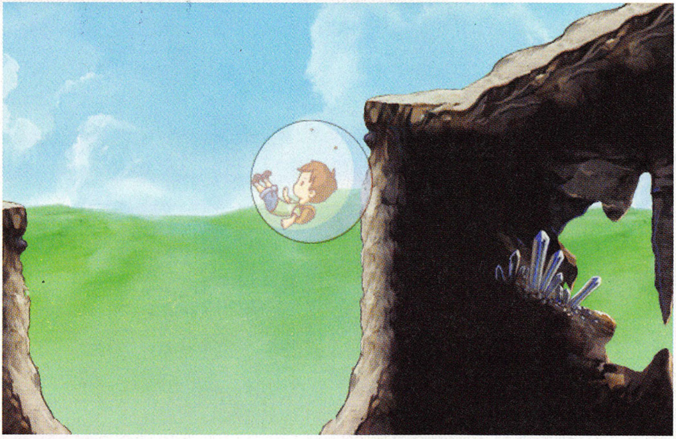
SEAN If the right people are reading this, give us a call!

Finally, why should players be excited about A Boy and His Blob making its long-awaited return?

SEAN Everyone should look forward to A Boy and His Blob! Lush art, symphonic sound, and lovable characters will dazzle your senses. Most of all, the action-puzzle gameplay is delightful! It's a classic game brought roaring into modern times, and I guarantee it is something very special.

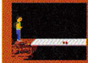
LARRY Why? Because it's made of win. Duh.

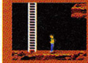


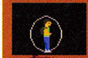


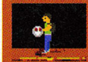
FLAVOR OF THE MONTH

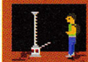
We don't know exactly what jelly bean flavors and corresponding transformations will be in the Wii version of A Boy and His Blob, but we know there's a mix of all-new abilities and classic ones from the NES game. To whet your appetite, here's a list of the jelly beans and their effects on the blob from the original game.

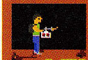

Strawberry = Bridge

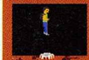

Licorice = Ladder

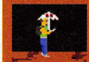

Cola = Bubble

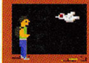

Coconut = Coconut

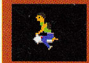

Apple = Jack

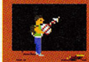

Cinnamon = Blowtorch

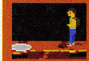

Tangerine = Trampoline

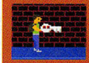

Vanilla = Umbrella

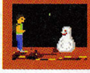

Honey = Hummingbird

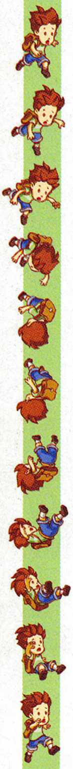

Root Beer = Rocket


Orange = Vitablaster


Punch = Hole


Lime = Key


Ketchup = Catch-Up


WayForward shows its 2-D prowess with amazingly detailed character animations!

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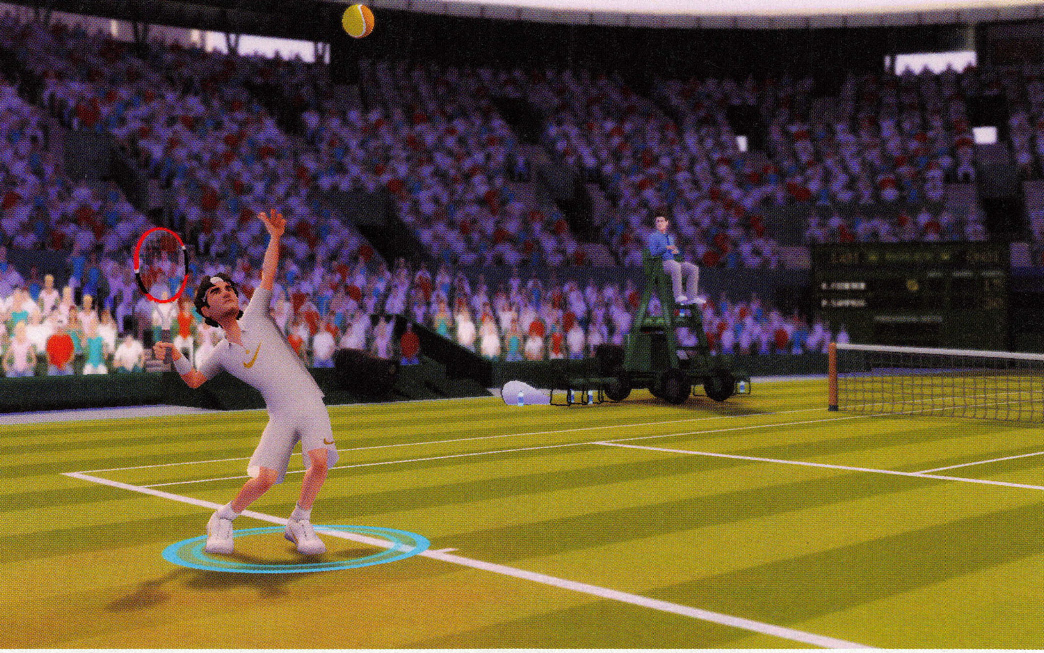
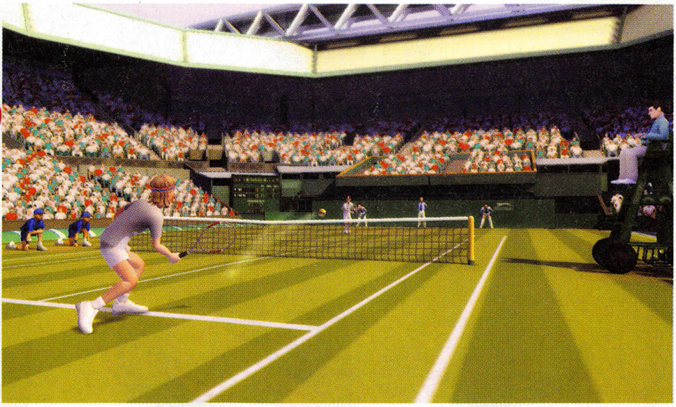


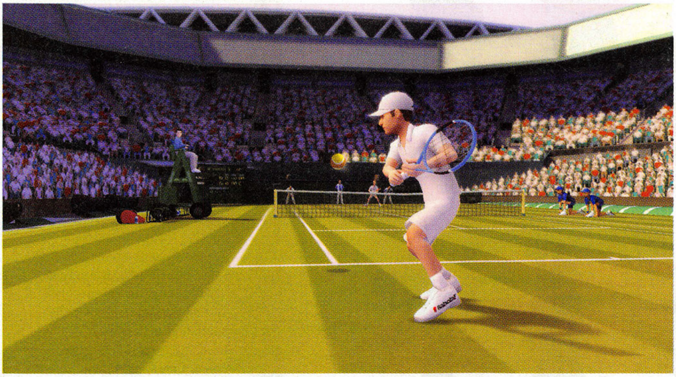
OPENING SERVE

EA invites us to center court for an exclusive first look at Grand Slam Tennis.

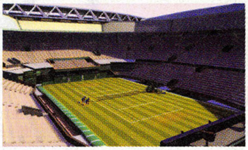
FOR GOING ON two decades now, EA Sports has been the leading purveyor of video game athletics. Arguably the most popular brand in all of interactive entertainment has given us everything from football to boxing to NASCAR and even rugby. Conspicuous by its absence, however, has been an enduring tennis franchise from the publisher. (Its last foray onto the courts was 1994's IMG International Tour Tennis for the Sega Genesis.) That'll finally change this summer when EA Sports introduces Grand Slam Tennis. And it's coming first to Wii.

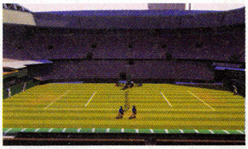
BY STEVE THOMASON

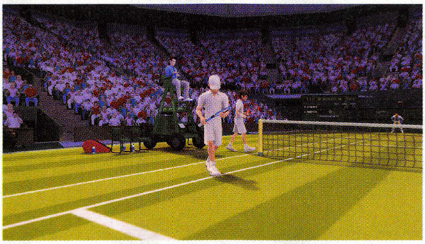




[Below] The legendary All England Club, host of Wimbledon since 1877, appears exclusively in Grand Slam Tennis.



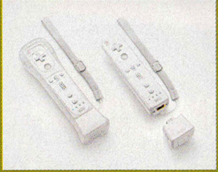




"Our main focus for this franchise is putting the racket in the palm of your hand," says producer Thomas Singleton. "We want to give you the sensation that you're literally playing tennis." Of course, Nintendo's little white console allows for that sensation better than any other platform, as already demonstrated to some extent by Wii Sports. But that game's version of tennis, for all its groundbreaking charm, is pretty simplistic. Singleton and his Vancouver-based team hope to take things to the next level, thanks in no small part to the Wii MotionPlus accessory (due out prior to Grand Slam's release). "That little device has us pretty excited," enthuses the producer.

Though the game can be played with just the standard Wii Remote, as Singleton explains, "It's responsive, but it's not a true one-to-one feeling. It's as close as we can get given what we're working with. But the second that I plug in the [Wii] MotionPlus, I can really experience that one-to-one relationship between myself and the player onscreen." We had the chance to try it for ourselves on a practice court, and sure enough, the characters mimicked our exact movements in real time. The game recognizes whether you're doing a forehand or backhand swing, how high you're holding the racket, and even the angle at which you're striking the ball. That means you can put topspin or backspin on your shot just as you would in real life, and ball placement depends not only on timing (as it does with the Wii Remote alone), but also on the angle at which you hold the controller and how you finish off your swing. The level of finesse made possible by Wii MotionPlus even allows for purely swing-controlled lob and drop shots, whereas playing without the peripheral requires you to hold down a button during the motion. It all works amazingly well, delivering an experience that feels far more authentic than anything else out there. (Though, thankfully, it's a lot more forgiving than the actual sport.)

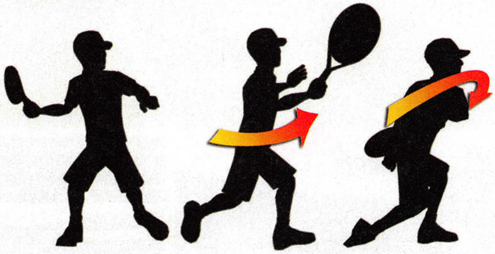
Grand Slam will also give you the option to play with or without the Nunchuk. As Singleton puts it, "From a pick-up-and-play standpoint, we want to let people just jump in there using only the Wii Remote." Character movement without the Nunchuk is mostly automatic à la Wii Sports, though



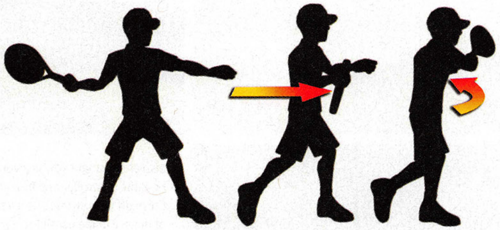
ADVANTAGE, Wii MOTIONPLUS

The Wii MotionPlus accessory allows the console to more accurately capture complex gestures. In Grand Slam Tennis, that means how you swing the racket will affect your shot just as it would in real life. Here are some forehand examples.

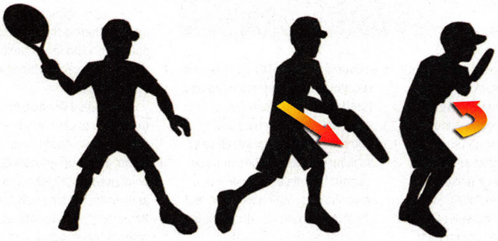
TOPSPIN Putting topspin on the ball causes it to drop at a steeper angle and bounce higher, making it a good rally starter.

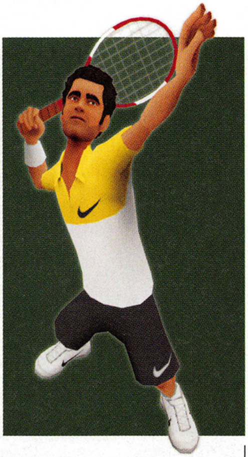


FLAT SHOT Flat shots give you the most power and are relatively easy to put where you want them, but they're also less difficult to return than other shots.



SLICE A slice (also called backspin) keeps the ball low coming over the net and gives the ball a low bounce, forcing your opponent to hit upward.



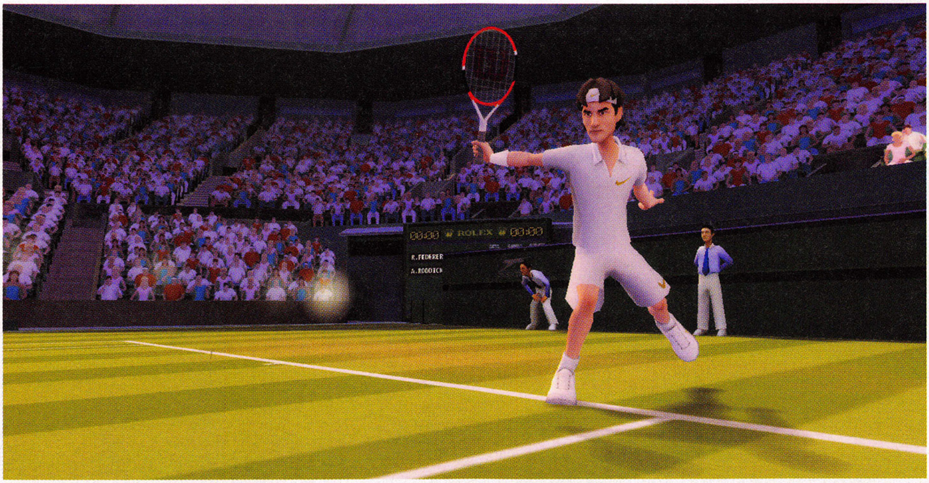


you can use the Control Pad to have your player rush the net or drop back. "But you can get a richer, deeper experience if you want to control all of the action and move your character manually using the Nunchuk," Singleton emphasizes.

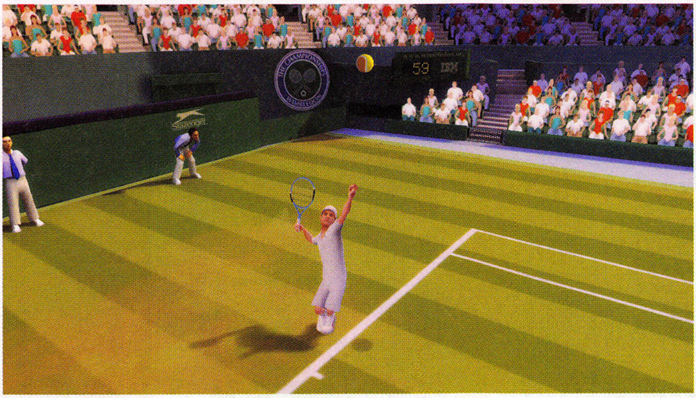
IT'S IN THE GAME

As you'd expect from a new EA Sports franchise, Grand Slam Tennis will boast an impressive selection of licensed players and venues. The roster consists of 22 current stars and legends of the sport (both male and female), including Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Andy Roddick, Pete Sampras, and Björn Borg. EA isn't prepared to reveal the entire lineup just yet, but Singleton promises only the best of the best. "In deciding which players to include, one of the stipulations was that they had to have a meaningful influence on the sport of tennis," says the producer. "Combined, I think they've won something like 126 singles championships in the Grand Slam tournaments."

Like other recent EA Sports efforts on Wii, the game features a slightly exaggerated visual style. Rather than try to go photorealistic, the development team wanted to give the Wii version a crisp, clean look and really focus on the animation. What we've seen thus far is impressive, with lots of nice subtleties that reflect each player's individual style and quirks. Roger Federer will roll his racket between his hands while waiting for a serve,



[Above] Don't miss, Federer! We'd hate to see you turn on the waterworks again.



and Rafael "Knicker Picker" Nadal will incessantly adjust his shorts. That differentiation extends to performance, as well; every player in the game behaves like his or her real-life counterpart. Federer is an all-court player, for instance, while Nadal sits back on the baseline and plays a more defensive style of tennis.

True to its name, Grand Slam includes painstaking recreations of the facilities from all four majors: the Australian Open, the French Open, the US Open, and Wimbledon (which is exclusive to EA's game). Not content to stop with center court like some other titles, Singleton's team is building the entire venue for each location, and you'll be able to compete on a total of 12 unique courts. The developer even recorded crowds and other audio from the actual sites, right down to the sweet sound of grass scuffs at Wimbledon.

PATH TO GREATNESS

Those storied venues will play host to your quest for greatness in the Grand Slam Career mode. The game's showcase single-player offering has you creating a player and progressing though a full calendar year with an eye toward earning a berth in each of the majors. Along the way, you'll compete not only in exhibition matches, but in a variety of Skill Challenges that test certain aspects of your game and allow you to improve your character's attributes. You'll also take on special Legend Challenges from time to time, and if you can defeat your Hall of Fame opponent, you'll learn one of his or her trademark abilities. You can equip up to three of these endowments at a time, and a big part of prematch strategy is using them to key up on your opponent's weaknesses. "If you're playing somebody who has a poor serve return, then you definitely want to use Pistol Pete's power serve," offers Singleton as an example. "You can adjust your weapons, if you will, to match the opponent that you're about to face."

Online capabilities and a bevy of multiplayer options are in the works as well, but details on those components remain under wraps for now. Nevertheless, this rookie effort already shows tremendous promise. Hopefully it can do for video game tennis what EA's Madden and Tiger have done for their respective sports.

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NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

OUR JOURNEY through Nintendo video game history as documented by Nintendo Power begins midway through the life cycle of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), Nintendo's first video game console. Since the decision to publish Nintendo Power arose from the success of that console and its first two years of games, we'll start with a look at the NES's early days.

Super Mario Bros.—Shigeru Miyamoto's action-platform masterpiece released in October 1985—was the standard-bearer for the NES. After the boom and bust of the early '80s, when Atari and other video game companies essentially closed up shop, the NES proved to a skeptical world that video games could provide hours of entertainment, challenge, joy, and value. Mr. Miyamoto has often said that his ideal video game is like a garden, where you can explore and discover hidden wonders. Super Mario Bros. was that garden, and the NES was the gateway that led to it—and to many wonderful gardens, some of them bright and whimsical, others dark and thrilling. The mid '80s were a time of experimentation, in which many video game genres were pioneered. Legendary franchises such as Mega Man, Castlevania, Metroid, and The Legend of Zelda all got their start in this era. Experimentation with control interfaces existed from the outset in the form of the Zapper and R.O.B. the robot. The NES didn't employ cutting-edge technology, but its processors were capable of generating sound and graphics that were a leap beyond those of the previous generation of home consoles. And in the hands of innovative programmers, the NES turned out to be a versatile and powerful instrument.

The NES proved to be so popular that some game publishers rushed products to market, creating a glut of games that many pundits thought would result in the video game market collapsing anew. But in spite of the existence of mediocre titles, there was always something new and exciting. Titles such as Rygar, Mighty Bomb Jack, The Adventures of Lolo, Ice Climber, Wizards & Warriors, Ghosts 'n Goblins, Crystalis, and many others may not have generated long-lasting franchises, but they provided hours of fun, and in the end that's what games are all about.

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2, RELEASED OCTOBER 1988, NINTENDO
The game that we know as Super Mario Bros. 2 in North America was called Doki Doki Panic in Japan, where it had been released a year earlier without any association to Mario. The game called Super Mario Bros. 2 that was released in Japan (in 1986) arrived on this side of the Pacific in 1993 entitled Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels, which was part of the Super Mario All-Stars collection for Super NES.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA, RELEASED AUGUST 1987, NINTENDO
By 1988, a year after The Legend of Zelda was released in North America, the title was well on its way to becoming a legend in more than name. An additional quest, accessible on the same cartridge to players who defeated Ganon in the main game, provided a second round of adventure with new dungeon locations and maps. Players raised on the comparatively shallow gaming experiences from the Atari generation of video games were thrilled to discover such hidden depths. *Replay* value entered the gaming lexicon.

The World of Dreams took on a Mario-esque air with the inclusion of Mario, Luigi, the Mushroom Retainer (Toad), and Princess Toadstool (Princess Peach). The game introduced Shy Guys, Birdo, and Mouser to the Super Mario Bros. pantheon.

04

05

NINTENDO POWER
Super Mario 2
Zelda – Second Quest
Free
ZELDA
The Second Quest Begins

NINTENDO 64

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Nintendo mixes cartoon DJs, soccer-playing spacemen, and mole-flipping farmers in **Rhythm Heaven**, one of the year's best—and most bizarre—new games for Nintendo DS.

BY CHRIS SLATE

KEEP THE BEAT

X
A
Y
B
START
SELECT
POWER

A POP STAR, a guitar-strumming ghost, a dog ninja, and a dancing frog—you groove along with all of them in Rhythm Heaven, one of the most charmingly offbeat music games we've ever played. Seriously, we love this game—if we had the power to ensure that everyone tries a few deserving titles each year, Rhythm Heaven would top the list for 2009. It isn't backed with a well-known brand or character, but for many who discover this little gem, it will be love at first play. Like Elite Beat Agents—Nintendo's other zany DS musical masterpiece—Rhythm Heaven's distinctive style and simple, addictive gameplay is sure to earn a dedicated following. The game is already a smash hit in Japan with over 1.7 million copies sold, and if we have anything to say about it, Rhythm Heaven will meet with similar success when it reaches our side of the Pacific in April.

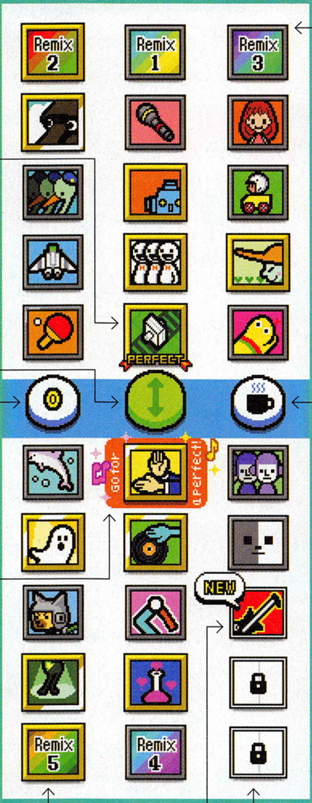
PICKING AND PLAYING

One tap of the stylus past the title screen waits the game's main menu, from which you can jump directly to any of Rhythm Heaven's minigames. There's more on the menu than first meets the eye, so let's take detailed look at the many useful pieces of info hidden on this screen. (We suppose it wouldn't hurt to take a quick peek at each of the minigames, too.)

Rhythm Heaven
Rank
Flow 116
Medals 12

Crop Stomp

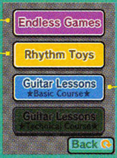
It's harvest time! It may seem like a weird way to pluck beets, but it works. Oh, watch out for moles!

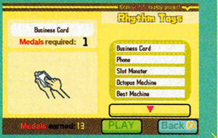

Remix 2
Remix 1
Remix 3
PERFECT
Go for a Perfect!
NEW
Remix 5
Remix 4

Ranking
A silver frame shows that the player has earned an OK ranking, gold indicates a score of Superb, and the word Perfect adorns any game for which you have completed a Perfect challenge.

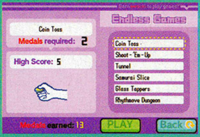
Move Screen Button
Touching the stylus here will allow you to drag the menu around (normally only the top or bottom half is visible at once).

Medals Menu
By collecting medals you unlock a selection of Endless Games, Rhythm Toys, and Guitar Lessons on this screen.


Endless Games
Rhythm Toys
Guitar Lessons ★Basic Course★
Guitar Lessons ★Technical Course★
Back


Rhythm Toys
Business Card
Phone
Slot Monster
Octopus Machine
Beat Machine
PLAY
Back

Business Card
Medals required: 1
Medals earned: 13

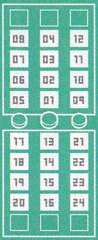

Endless Games
Coin Toss
Shoot-'Em-Up
Tunnel
Samurai Slice
Glass Tappers
Rhythmove Dungeon
PLAY
Back

Coin Toss
Medals required: 2
High Score: 5
Medals earned: 13

Make sure you mute the strings at the right time. That's important.

Perfect Challenge
The game randomly challenges you to complete a minigame without messing up once.

Minigames
Only the two basic sets are shown here; the menu expands once the tougher stages are unlocked.


08
04
12
07
03
11
06
02
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05
01
09
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13
21
18
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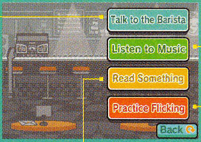
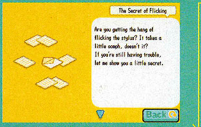
23
20
16
24

Coffee Menu
Here you can get game tips from the barista, listen to any music tracks you've unlocked, read hints, or redo the game's opening tutorial.

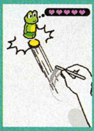

Talk to the Barista
Listen to Music
Read Something
Practice Flicking
Back

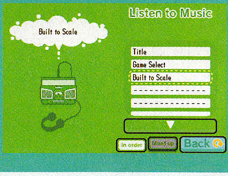


The Secret of Flicking

Are you getting the hang of flicking the stylus? It takes a little oomph, doesn't it?
If you're still having trouble, let me show you a little secret.

I had the worst time getting to sleep last night.



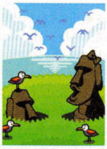

Listen to Music
Built to Scale
Title
Game Select
Built to Scale
In order
Mixed up
Back

Remix Stages
These levels mix up the action with cuts from the other minigames in their column.

New Game
This minigame has just been unlocked and hasn't been played yet.

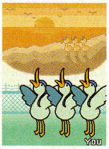
Locked
Each minigame must be beaten before the next is unlocked; the ones shown here aren't yet accessible.

NOTE: THE GAMES BELOW ARE NUMBERED IN THE ORDER THEY APPEAR.



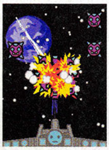
08 Moai Doo-Wop

The left statue pops up to sing long and short notes, which you match with the right statue by tapping or holding the stylus on the screen.



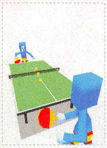
07 Blue Birds

As the third bird, you must match the actions of the other two by pecking the ground (three quick taps) or posing (an upward flick).



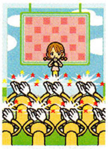
06 Shoot-'Em-Up

Incoming enemies appear in different rhythmic patterns that you have to remember and duplicate with stylus taps to blast them.



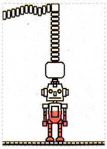
05 Rhythm Rally

By flicking the stylus, you swing your paddle to match the changing speed and rhythm of ongoing ping-pong volleys.



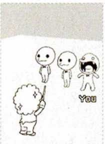
04 Fan Club

As the upper-right monkey, you listen to the girl's pop love song for cues to either clap (tap) or leap into the air (flick) with your fellow simians.



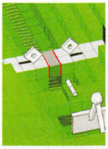
03 Fillbots

You follow the rhythm of robots moving down a conveyor belt to fill them up (hold the stylus to the screen) and then let them go (lift up).



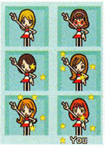
02 Glee Club

Hold the stylus to the screen until it's your turn to sing, then lift it to match the length and timing of the notes sung by the other two guys.



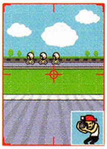
01 Built to Scale

By flicking the stylus, you swing a paddle into a rod, which—when timed correctly with piano notes—connects two bolts as they cross in the center.



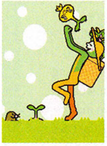
12 The Dazzles

Hold the stylus to the screen to darken the lower-right square, then flick it up to pose at the pace and timing set by the other girls.



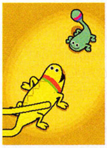
11 Freeze Frame

After spotting how many cars cross in the background, you tap that number of times to snap photos as the cars speed back by in the foreground.



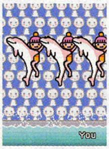
10 Crop Stomp

Tap and hold to stomp on an onion and knock it into the air, then flick up to bat it back into your basket (pesky moles get flung off the screen).



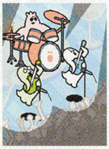
09 Love Lizards

With the stylus held to the screen, wait for the blue lizard to shuffle its feet, then match the timing of its movements by sliding up and down.



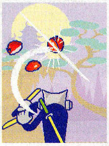
17 Splashdown

As the third swimmer, you match the timing of the first two as they dive (hold the stylus to the screen), surface (lift the stylus), and jump (flick).



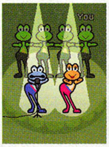
18 Big Rock Finish

The drummer counts down to the ends of various songs, and you (the white ghost) give a rockin' finish by holding and flicking the stylus.



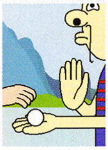
19 Dog Ninja

Fruit, bones, tires, and other objects are thrown on and off the beat, and you flick the stylus to slash them to the rhythm of the music.



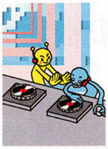
20 Frog Hop

The NP staff favorite! You tap to swing your hips to the beat of the frog's old-fashioned rock tune, and slide the stylus sideways to spin in place.



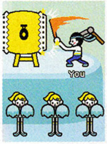
13 Munchy Monk

As eggs are placed in the monk's hand, you tap the screen to pop them into his mouth. The timing changes when two or three are tossed in a row.



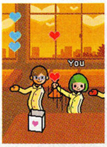
14 DJ School

As the blue DJ, you hold the stylus to the screen to stop the record when the yellow DJ tells you, then flick to play it when given the go-ahead.



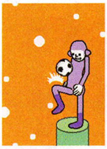
15 Drummer Duel

A man on the left beats on the drum, then the screen scrolls to your side, where you tap to repeat the speed and pacing of the previous hits.



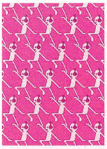
16 Love Lab

The scientist on the left shakes a beaker then throws it to you, and you slide the stylus up and down to repeat his actions before passing it on.



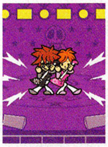
21 Space Soccer

Simply tap the stylus to the tempo of the song to keep the ball in the air, and flick the stylus to kick the ball higher when given an audio cue.



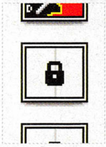
22 Lockstep

This is the simplest *and* toughest game. You just keep tapping, but the trick is in switching from tapping on the beat to off the beat.



23 Rockers

As the red-haired rocker on the right, you repeat your partner's guitar licks by flicking the stylus to one of the game's coolest songs.



24 (Game Locked)

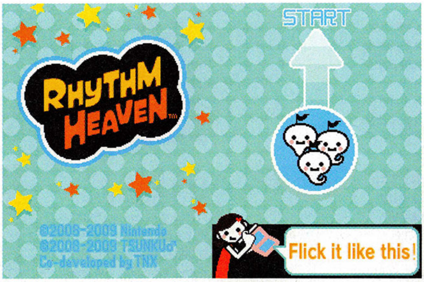
This padlock icon is what you see when a minigame hasn't been opened up yet. (We'll keep the last main game a secret for now.)

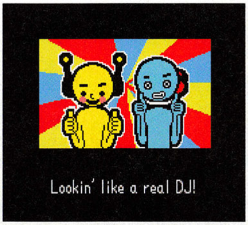
What exactly *is* this wild and wacky game? Rhythm Heaven is similar to the WarioWare titles (which were developed by the same team) in that it packs in a wide variety of quick bite-sized minigames that are all very simple but can be very challenging. Each features its own song (and let me tell you, you'll be humming these infectious tunes for weeks) and requires the player to match the beat and onscreen visual cues by tapping the stylus, holding it down, sliding it, or flicking it off the screen. The DS is always held sideways in the "book" position, as with Hotel Dusk, Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword, and Brain Age.

There are 24 main games in Rhythm Heaven—16 of which have unlockable harder variations—plus 10 special remix stages that blend a sampling of minigames within a single song. That's a hefty total of 50 stages, and there are extra side games tucked away as a bonus. Although the same small set of stylus controls is always used, the varied tempo, timing, and graphic styles make the levels diverse and keep the screen-tapping action fresh. From building robots to synchronized swimming to lizard mating dances, each minigame offers its own special charm. It's hard to take a break from Rhythm Heaven; even after you've cleared a game, you won't want to quit until you see what madness unfolds in the next one. And you'll want to replay minigames to get a better ranking and earn medals that unlock a long list of bonus games and other goodies.

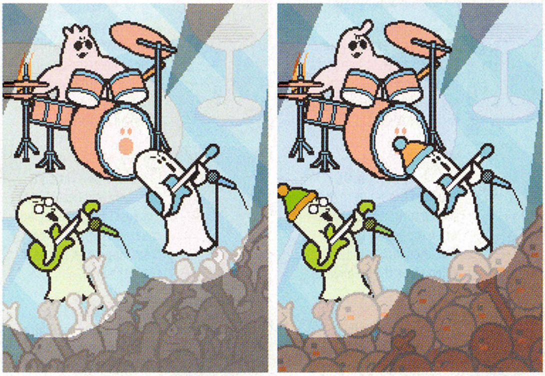
True to the game's title, rhythm is at the core of everything you do. In fact, once you get in the flow of things, you can play many of the stages without even looking at the screen. Every stylus motion you make adds an important piece to the music, so once you know what the song is supposed to sound like, you can mostly play it by ear. In a weird way, this gives you the feeling that you're performing the music, even if you're tossing eggs into a monk's mouth instead of strumming a guitar. Once a minigame clicks for you that way, Rhythm Heaven becomes as fun and engaging as any music game we've played.

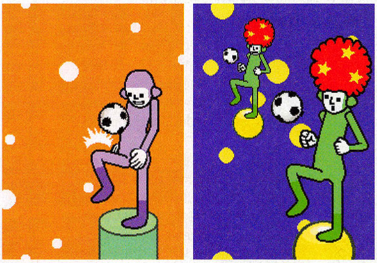
Even navigating the main menu is a joy. The various minigames, represented by small icons, are aligned in columns. You drag the menu around with the stylus to




Lookin' like a real DJ!

[Above] Stylus tapping and flicking is used for everything, even to start the game. [Right] Each rank has its own stage-complete screen.



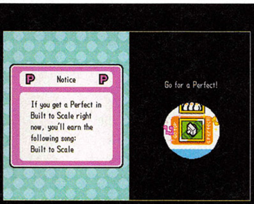


[Left and above] After every four minigames you complete, you are challenged with a special Remix stage that shuffles up parts from those previous levels into one song. Switching between game types on the fly adds an extra layer of challenge, plus the game snippets look and play slightly differently than before.

Try Again
Just OK
Superb
You got a medal!

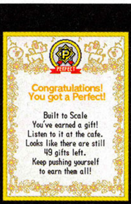
Striving for Perfection

Upon completing a minigame, your performance is given one of three rankings—Try Again, OK, or Superb—the last of which nets you a medal that goes toward unlocking extras. Occasionally you're challenged to make a perfect run through a randomly chosen minigame, and if you nail it in three tries, you receive a special award and that stage's song is made available for you to listen to at any time.


Notice

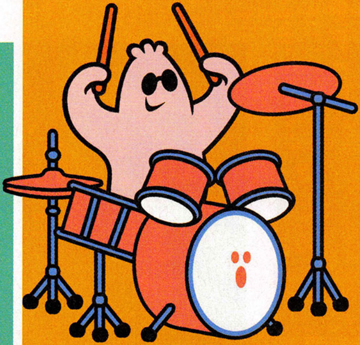
If you get a Perfect in Built to Scale right now, you'll earn the following song: Built to Scale

Go for a Perfect!



Congratulations! You got a Perfect!

Built to Scale
You've earned a gift!
Listen to it at the cafe.
Looks like there are still 49 gifts left.
Keep pushing yourself to earn them all!

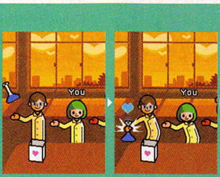


BREAK IT DOWN

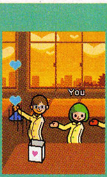
It's tough to illustrate how a music- and timing-based game like Rhythm Heaven plays using still images, but we'll give it a shot. These screen sequences should give you a sense of how the various minigames work. Each game is very straightforward, but the genius of Rhythm Heaven lies in the various ways you are required to use the same few stylus actions throughout. (Keep an eye on the circles shown on the touch screen—they indicate where the stylus is being tapped or held.)

BREAK IT DOWN: LOVE LAB

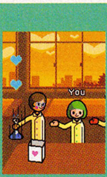
Love is in the air (or is that sulfuric gas?) as you shake things up with your fellow scientist.



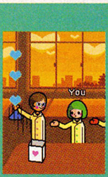
WATCH A beaker is thrown to the male scientist and he catches it on the beat.



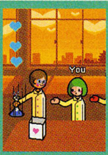
WATCH He shakes it up...



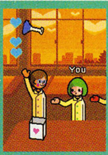
WATCH ...down...



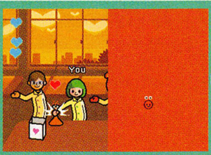
WATCH ...up...



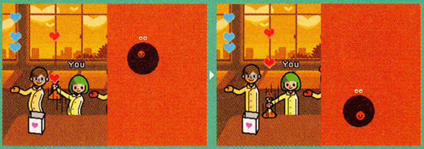
WATCH ...down...



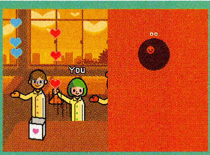
WATCH ...and then tosses it to you.



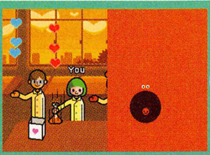
ACT! You also have to catch the beaker on the beat...



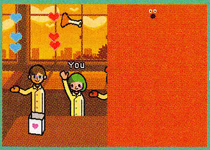
ACT! ...then match the rhythm of the first scientist's previous movements with shakes of your own. Just as he did, you shake up...down...



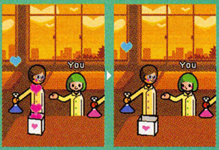
ACT! ...up...



ACT! ...down...



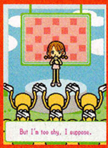
ACT! ...and then toss the beaker to the next person—er, bear—in line.



WATCH If the rhythm of your shakes matches his, love will bloom!

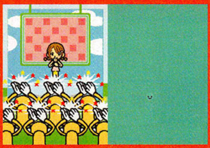
BREAK IT DOWN: FAN CLUB

As the upper-right monkey, you time claps and jumps during pauses in the girl's singing.

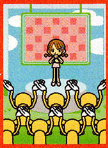


But I'm too shy, I suppose.

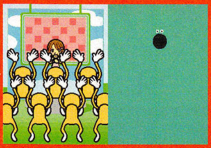
WAIT Listen to the girl sing her song.



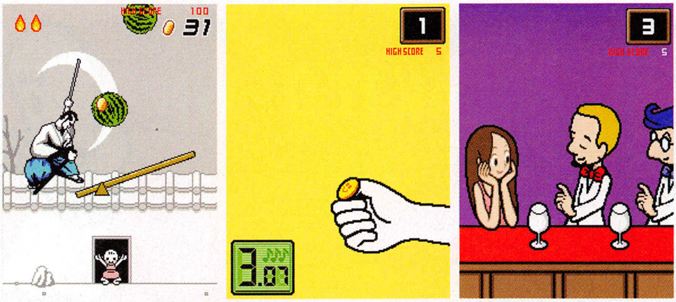
ACT! When she says certain words, tap the stylus to clap to the beat.

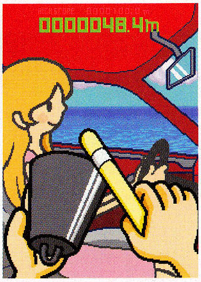


WAIT After a certain audio cue...



ACT! ...you make your monkey jump with the others by flicking the stylus.





[Above and right] Winning medals unlocks Endless Games, which are simple bonus challenges that last (and keep getting harder) until you make a few mistakes. There are a total of six.

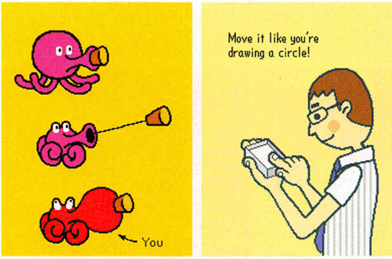
see the full list of stages, and then tap on one to play it. As you clear levels and earn medals, more stages and bonus content are unlocked and added to the menu.

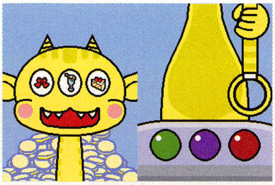
The bulk of the bonus content is split into two categories: Endless Games and Rhythm Toys. The first category includes stages that are similar to Rhythm Heaven's main games, only they keep going until you mess up rather than having a set end point. Examples include flipping and catching a coin, and tapping a cowbell to a beat that comes and goes as you ride through tunnels in a car. The second bonus category, Rhythm Toys, doesn't offer any real challenge; the offerings here are just goofy doodads for you to monkey around with, like a monster-shaped slot machine and the musical tones of telephone buttons. In addition to the two main bonus categories, there are also Guitar Lessons, which are a series of challenges that expand upon one of the most enjoyable main minigames, and a few other unlockable surprises that we won't spoil here.

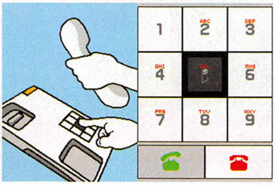
The game's music mostly comes from a superpopular Japanese producer, singer, and songwriter who goes by the name of Tsunku. His tracks show a wide variety of style and influences, and—when paired with the game's gleefully goofy characters and scenarios—never fail to put a smile on your face. The complete soundtrack can be played within the game, but each song must be unlocked by beating its accompanying stage without making a single mistake.

Beautifully quirky and imaginative, Rhythm Heaven is perfect for players who appreciate games that are off the beaten path. But despite its bizarre presentation, the title should also appeal to almost anyone, thanks to its very accessible gameplay and catchy songs, some of which even include vocals. The quick-play minigames are perfectly suited for a handheld; this has already become our go-to game for fast play sessions anytime we've got a few minutes to have fun.

As you've no doubt guessed by now, you can expect to see a very positive review in our next issue. In the meantime, do yourself a favor and preorder this title before word of its coolness gets around.





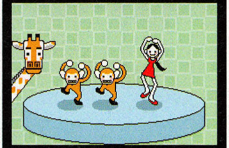


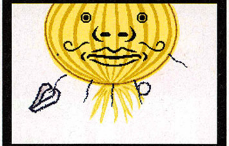
[Above and right] As with Endless Games, Rhythm Toys are each unlocked by collecting the required number of medals from Rhythm Heaven's main stages. These simple diversions aren't really games, but can be fun to fool around with nonetheless. There are seven in all, ranging from a slot machine to a telephone keypad.

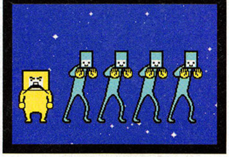
GAME BOY ADVANCE
ゲームボーイアドバンス
Nintendo
リズム天国

Hidden Tracks

Rhythm Heaven is the second game in a series; the first was a Japan-only Game Boy Advance title called Rhythm Tengoku. Eagle-eyed Nintendo Power readers may recall spotting the game in our February 2008 issue (Vol. 225) in a feature titled "Lost in Translation," in which we spotlighted our 12 favorite DS games that were never released in North America. Even before our feature, Rhythm Tengoku had generated a lot of buzz online and found a community of rabid fans here in the West. The original game doesn't share any content with the new DS sequel, so Rhythm Tengoku is still a must-have title if you can get your hands on it.



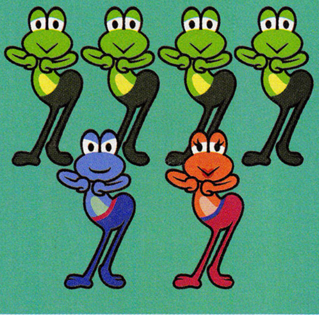


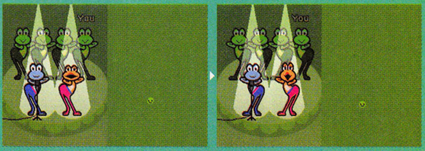


PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK MADEO

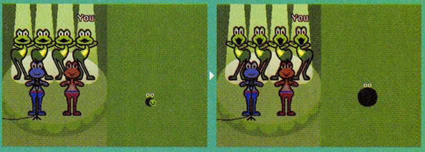
BREAK IT DOWN: FROG HOP

As a blue frog sings retro sock-hop-style rock-'n'-roll, you stand in back, swinging your hips to a quick and catchy beat.

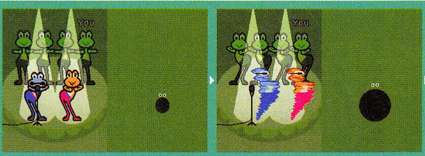




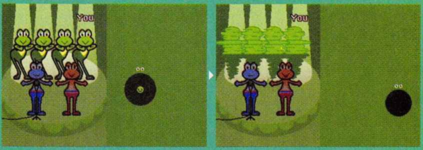
ACT! As the last in the line of green frogs, your primary job is to constantly tap the stylus to swing your hips left and right to the beat of the song.



ACT! When the spotlight shines on your group, you have to match the rhythm of the special hip swings that the frogs in front just performed.



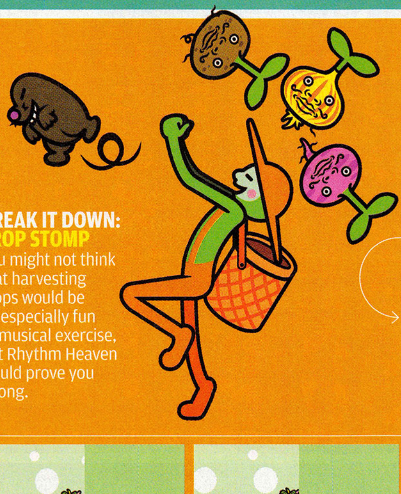
ACT! Sometimes the lead frogs quickly swing their hips to the left and then perform a special spin move (during which you keep tapping to the beat).

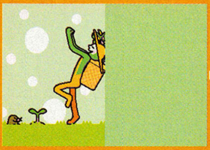


ACT! When it's your turn, you have to match their spins by holding the stylus to the screen for a brief moment, then flicking it sideways.

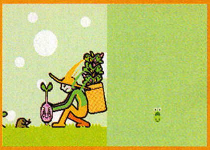
BREAK IT DOWN: CROP STOMP

You might not think that harvesting crops would be an especially fun or musical exercise, but Rhythm Heaven would prove you wrong.

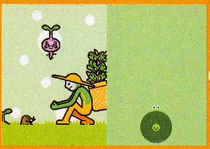




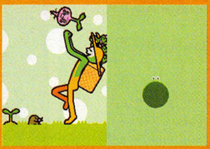
WAIT The farmer marches to the beat, and when he nears an onion...



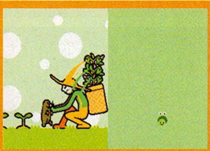
ACT! ...you tap the stylus to make him stomp down on the ground.



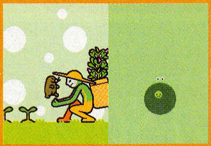
WAIT Hold the stylus to the screen as the onion flies into the air, then...



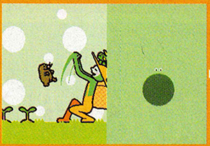
ACT! ...flick the stylus up to bat the onion back into the basket.



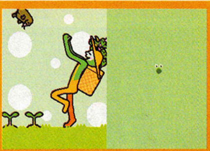
ACT! Sometimes the farmer comes across a mole—stomp him, too!



WAIT He doesn't fly as high into the air, so the timing is different.



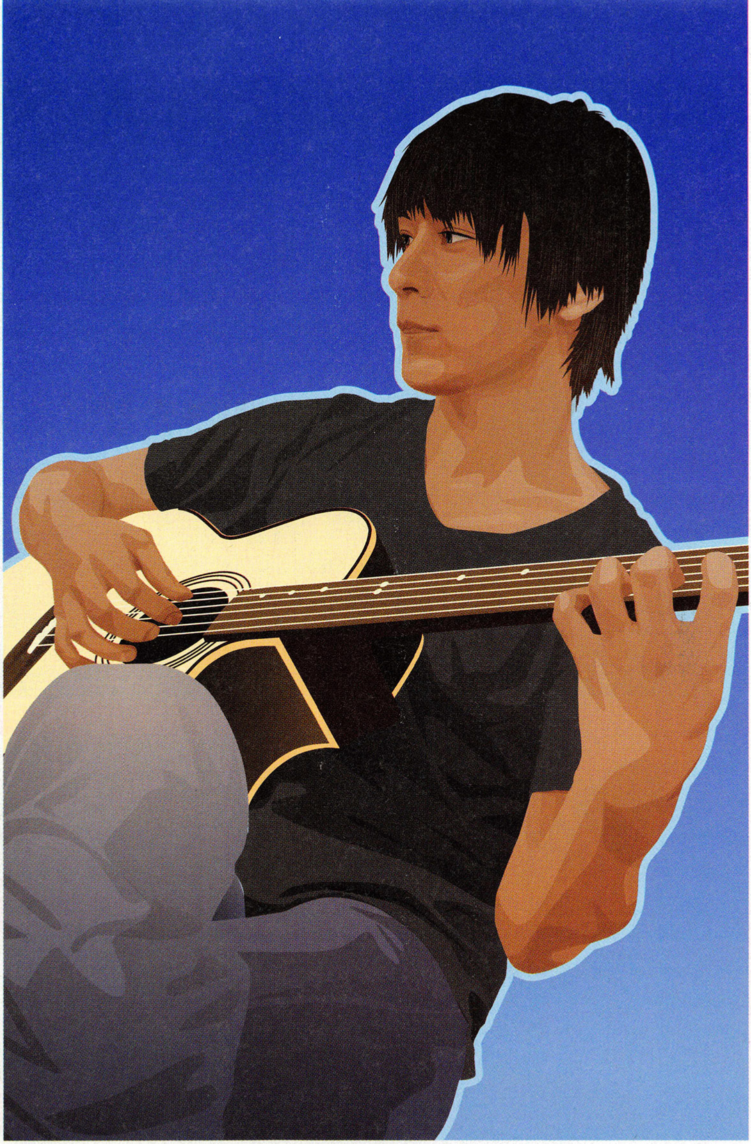
ACT! With a much quicker flick, the farmer bats the mole away.



WAIT The mole keeps flying; where he lands, nobody knows.

25

Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
January 2, 1972

BIRTHPLACE
Shunan City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan

POSITION
Composer, orchestrator, president of Procyon Studio

BEST KNOWN FOR
Composing the soundtracks for Chrono Trigger, Xenogears, and many other RPGs

FAVORITE FOOD
Japanese food

CURRENT PROJECTS
Sands of Destruction (DS), Arc Rise Fantasia (Wii), *Inazuma Eleven* (anime), and undisclosed projects for Wii, DS, and PS3

Yasunori Mitsuda

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

If you're in the mood for game music that's unique, memorable, and emotionally compelling, look no further than the works of Yasunori Mitsuda. Having learned the ropes as a part-timer at developer Wolf Team before joining Square (now Square Enix), Mitsuda finally got his chance to shine as the composer on the 1995 hit Chrono Trigger, which launched his career as one of the top musicians in the gaming industry. When he's not composing some of the most powerful original scores in video games, Mitsuda can be found putting his music-arrangement talents to use (he remixed tunes for the 2003 *Street Fighter Tribute Album* and, more recently, for Super Smash Bros. Brawl) or composing original albums, such as *Kirite*, a collaboration with Chrono Trigger scenario writer Masato Kato. Now the president of Procyon Studio, Mitsuda heads a team of like-minded individuals who continually strive to deliver the best audio in gaming and maintain their reputation as one of the hardest-working studios in the business.

NINTENDO POWER **When did you become interested in music? How did that evolve into a career for you?**

MITSUDA I started learning music when I was four or five years old, but I soon quit. When I was in junior high and high school I wasn't into music that much, but after watching a movie in high school I decided I wanted to compose music for films.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I liked sports at that time, so I wanted to be an athlete. [laughs] I also wanted seriously to be a detective at one time.

What instruments do you play, and which is your favorite?

There are many kinds of instruments I'm not good at! [laughs] But the guitar is my favorite, since it's fun to play.

How did you first become involved in the video game industry?

While I was an assistant, working with my mentor on a project to compose gaming music, we were at the game developer's office when I happened to come across a magazine with a classified ad for a position at Square. I decided to apply to that position, was hired, and began my gaming career.

On your early games you were credited as sound designer, then as composer on Chrono Trigger. What were your duties as sound designer, and what was it like making the jump from that to composer?

There is no difference between the role of the sound designer and composer. If you want to work in game music you have to have both abilities. Both jobs are very hard and difficult. [laughs] I would say the difference between them is that you will use different parts of the brain for each.

We think that Chrono Trigger has some of the best game music ever made, but we've heard stories about it being a challenging game for you. Can you explain what happened during the process of creating that game's soundtrack, and how it ended up as a collaborative effort with Nobuo Uematsu?

As you stated, the game-development process was not as easy as the team expected. We were breaking our backs to create the content. When I was working on Chrono Trigger, I ended up going to the hospital during work. That's why Uematsu-san helped me.

What difficulties did you face when you were first starting out? Was it challenging to cope with the restrictions of 16-bit sound capabilities?

My first challenge was the limitation of memory capacity. It was frustrating because even if I wanted to express a certain sound or tone, it was often impossible due to the capacity.

What's the process like for composing game music? For example, how much of the game do you get to see beforehand?

At the very least, I usually try to get information and illustrations about the scenario, characters, and stage setups before I start to compose. However, you have to compose concurrently with development nowadays, so there tends to be less information, which makes it harder for me to work. If it's possible, I'd prefer to compose music during the debugging or the balancing stage (after the primary game is completed).

How has your musical style changed since the 16-bit days?

Hmm, I'm not sure. Regardless of 16-bit sound or not, I think my composition style has changed in some areas but has remained consistent in others.

How has the video game industry changed during the time you've been involved with it?

I think this industry is not going in the right direction in Japan. First, I think that the quality of Japanese creators is getting lower; they aren't as motivated, and don't put their soul into their work. They don't devote enough of the budget to important things, yet also waste time on unnecessary parts. I guess it's going to be difficult to have good titles coming from Japan like we used to if we keep going on in this way.

What do you think the key is to composing compelling music, especially on modern hardware?

That is actually a very difficult issue. Frankly, I believe the graphic quality in recent games is so high and expresses the game so well that music is not really needed to tell the story. Therefore composers must fully understand the game and interpret which areas require what type of music and sound (what we call sound directing) to best express the title.

Now that you run your own studio, Procyon, how do you balance your time between running the studio and actually composing music? What are your day-to-day duties running the company?

Our staff is a group of very talented creators, and they're also experienced, so I don't have to teach or direct them. And there isn't

GAMEOGRAPHY

Yasunori Mitsuda has worked on numerous titles during his career, and almost all of them are epic in nature. Most of his recent soundtracks are collaborations with his fellow composers at Procyon Studios.

このピンチは ぎゃくに チャンス！
せんだい およろこびください！
やってみせ

HANJUKU HERO: AA SEKAIYO HANJUKUNARE...!
1992, SUPER FAMICOM
SOUND DESIGNER

CHRONO TRIGGER
1995, SUPER NINTENDO
COMPOSER

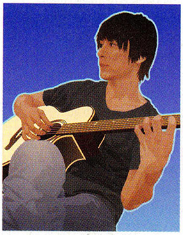
Fei
"Are you alright, doc?
What are you doing all
the way up there?"

XENOGEARS
1998, PLAYSTATION
COMPOSER

CHRONO CROSS
2000, PLAYSTATION
COMPOSER

XENOSAGA EPISODE I: DER WILLE ZUR MACHT
2003, PLAYSTATION 2
COMPOSER

Power Profiles



too much work as president. Maybe I need to sign off on some documents now and then.... Mostly I just stay in my studio to compose! [laughs]

It seems like your studio puts out music as a group effort. Do you generally guide them to create a specific sound, or does everybody sort of do their own thing?
I sometimes do a final check, but as I said before, my staff is very good, so I don't need to give them detailed directions. The reason we put out as a group effort is that, usually, we make music together. There is a strong relationship between the music and sound effects, so I strongly believe in working on both simultaneously to make a great piece. We don't make just the music and then make just the sound effects, and that improves the quality of our work. We also have some programmers on staff.

What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having your own independent studio?
The bigger staff we have, the more space we need. And that costs more, so it's simply not so easy. But the good thing is that we can collaborate to produce high-quality work.

How do you decide what projects to take on?
It's simple: I look at the game and see if it seems fun or not, and I look at how much passion the producer and director have.

How did you end up remixing the Pikmin and Kirby songs for Super Smash Bros. Brawl?
Mr. [Masahiro] Sakurai, the director of that game, contacted me to ask me to join that project. I accepted that offer because he was talking about the game with tremendous passion, even though I didn't really have any time to spare back then. And I chose the music I would compose.

For a long time we've been hoping for more arranged versions of some of your game soundtracks. Do you have any more planned?
There are quite a few things I want to do, but I don't really have the time.... I would like to make an arranged version of Chrono Cross sometime.

Are there any existing game franchises out there that you think it would be fun to compose music for?
Little Big Planet and Age of Empires.

Do you have a particular favorite song or soundtrack you've composed?
I love all of them.

We've always felt that your music has a very unique sound, especially the way it incorporates vocals and a Celtic influence. What interests you in that type of music?
I just like that kind of sound. Not only the Celtic music, but there are many types of interesting music that are very powerful. I like to mix these unique music styles with my own.

Who or what are some of your other musical influences?
Pretty much all composers influence me. I easily get influenced, and I like almost all types of music from all over the world.

When you reach a roadblock while composing a tune, what's your process for working through it?
Lately, my schedule is so busy that I don't even get the luxury of having roadblocks! However, if I did reach a roadblock, I would probably go climb Mt. Fuji or something.

Do you play games for fun? Do you play music games?
I just can't play them now. I want to try some music games but have no time....

As evidenced by the Chrono games, Sands of Destruction, and your album *Kirite*, you seem to have developed a strong relationship with Masato Kato. How did you become friends, and what makes your work a good match for each other?
When I say this I'm not speaking only about Mr. Kato, but I love working with creators who know a lot about music. But Mr. Kato and I became good friends since we usually fight so much during game development. [laughs] Just kidding. Sometimes I complain about his scenario, and he complains about my music in turn. We don't hesitate to challenge each other and we never give up on what we want to do. We inspire each other to make good games, so this is a very good relationship. By the way, other than working, we go for drinks and talk about many things such as music, movies, and novels without fighting.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
Mr. Sakurai, the director of the Super Smash Bros. series, and Mr. [Akihiro] Hino, the president of Level-5. I wonder when they sleep. They work so hard. I will try to be more like them!

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
You know, there are too many of those. I can't say because it would take a year to list all of them!

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
Pastime.... I guess I like to go to fancy coffee shops to enjoy coffee.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
The ability to fly. Because I hate the train filled with so many commuters.

GAMEOGRAPHY

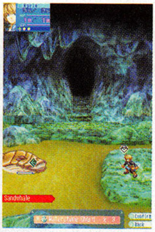
Theo
Archer
HP: 49/ 49
MP: 14/ 14
FP: 3/5
ATTACK: 34
TECH: 15
DAMAGE: 27
HIT RATE: 99%
Jaast
Cerberus
HP: 70/ 70
MP: 20/ 20
FP: 3/5
GUARD: 19
SPEED: 7
Is this okay?
Yes
No

LUMINOUS ARC
2007, DS
COMPOSER

SUPER SMASH BROS. BRAWL
2008, Wii
ARRANGEMENT SUPERVISOR FOR VS. MARX AND WORLD MAP (PIKMIN 2) TRACKS

Yasunori Mitsuda: Well, now it's my turn to set off on a journey to see what the world holds in store. I wonder if I shall ever return.

CHRONO TRIGGER
2008, DS
COMPOSER/SOUND SUPERVISOR



SANDS OF DESTRUCTION
2009, DS
COMPOSER

ARC RISE FANTASIA
2009, Wii
COMPOSER

Your Brain on Peggle™

FEVERMETER
EXTREME FEVER
Peggle
DUAL SHOT
NINTENDO DS
PopCap
EVERYONE
E
ESRB
Multiplayer Duel + Exclusive Levels
EXTREME FEVER
All-New Bonus Underground
120 Levels + 90 Challenges
Pop Cap
Q?
Q ENTERTAINMENT

"...ideal for your gaming-on-the-go needs."
— *GameSpot*

Peggle Everywhere: Xbox 360® PC/Mac iPhone™ iPod® Mobile www.pegglegame.com

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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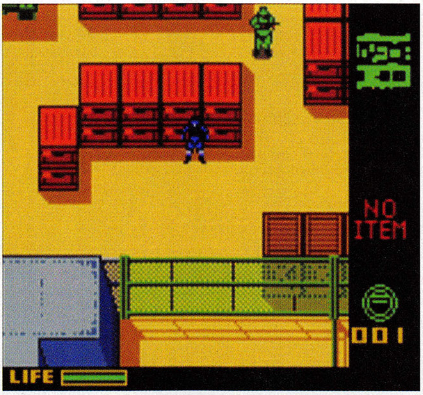
It's cozy in here!

METAL GEAR SOLID

GAME BOY COLOR
KONAMI
METAL GEAR SOLID
ONLY FOR GAME BOY COLOR

Snake. Snake! Snake!? Stop shouting, Colonel—he's right here on GBC.

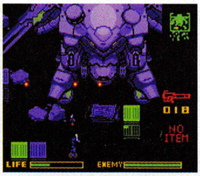


Nothing to see here, soldier boy. Just move along. Move along.

PLATFORM: GAME BOY COLOR
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: KCE JAPAN
RELEASE: MAY 2000
COVERED IN ISSUES: 130, 132, 134, 138
LENGTH OF OPENING CINEMA (IN MINUTES): 14

Many gamers remember that Hideo Kojima's legendary Metal Gear series made its North American debut on the NES, bringing with it an all-new style of gameplay that focused on avoiding conflicts instead of rushing into them. Most gamers also know that the franchise later became one of the greatest successes of the 32-bit era with Metal Gear Solid on PlayStation. Not as many, however, recall the series' triumphant return to Nintendo systems: the Game Boy Color release of Metal Gear Solid.

Even though the game was called Metal Gear Solid, it wasn't a port of the PS1 title. In fact, the game was known as Metal Gear: Ghost Babel in Japan. It featured many similarities to its PS1 namesake, however; legendary soldier Solid Snake was once again called out of retirement to fight a new Metal Gear (that's a bipedal nuclear-equipped tank) menace, and during the course of his mission he sparked a romance with a female soldier, befriended a geeky Metal Gear engineer, and fought deadly bosses with crazy code names such as Marionette Owl and Black Art Viper who felt compelled to tell Snake their tragic life stories upon their defeat. Perhaps the reason for the same-but-different feel is that the game isn't part of official Metal Gear canon; it's essentially an alternative look at what could have happened in the Metal Gear universe.



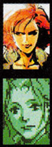
Of course, the game featured the "tactical espionage action" the series is known for. Despite the Game Boy Color's fairly limited interface, players could do almost everything they could on console Metal Gear games, including sidle along walls, knock to distract guards, and belly-crawl under objects. OK, so Snake couldn't actually choke out enemies from behind, but he did have access to a fantastic arsenal of equipment, including pistols, assault rifles, grenades, a gas mask, infrared goggles, cardboard boxes (naturally), and his infamous fogger (which looked suspiciously like a cigarette). The game also made remarkable use of the GBC's small screen by cramming on a lot of content, including a fully functioning radar, while still keeping the characters recognizable.

Metal Gear Solid on GBC may not be as well known as Solid Snake's other adventures, but in its own way it's every bit as legendary. Though there have been subsequent attempts at handheld Metal Gear games, the Game Boy Color version remains arguably the best, and the title easily stands out as one of the system's greatest.

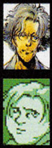
—CHRIS H.

ACROSS THE KOJIMAVERSE

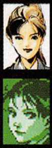
While the Game Boy Color and PlayStation versions of Metal Gear Solid were entirely different games, their characters featured similar traits.



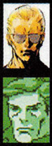
Meryl and Chris
Apparently love *can* bloom on the battlefield. Snake seemed to develop feelings for both redhead Meryl Silverburgh and blonde Chris Jenner, but both women got captured for their troubles. Unlike Meryl, Chris had a hidden agenda.



Otacon and Jimmy
Hal "Otacon" Emmerich and James "Jimmy the Wizard" Harks both worked on Metal Gear. Otacon wet himself, but his nickname was much cooler than Jimmy's, and he lived a lot longer.



Mei Ling and Mei Ling
Young genius Mei Ling was one of the few characters to appear in both versions of MGS.



Master Miller and Brian McBride
We don't want to give away too much, but neither Master Miller nor Brian McBride—both of whom offered advice to Snake via radio—was quite who he appeared to be.

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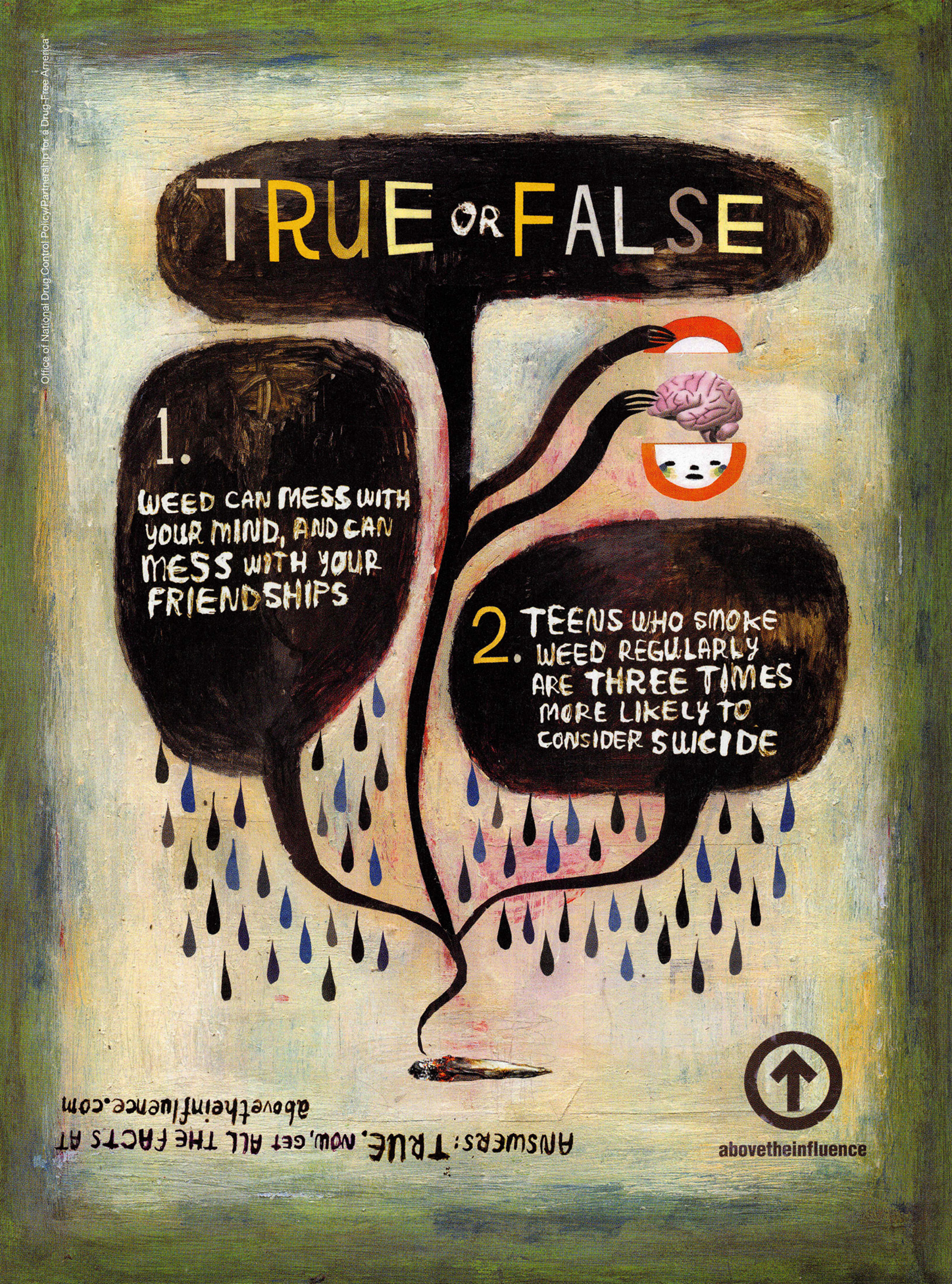
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APRIL 2009

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REVIEWS

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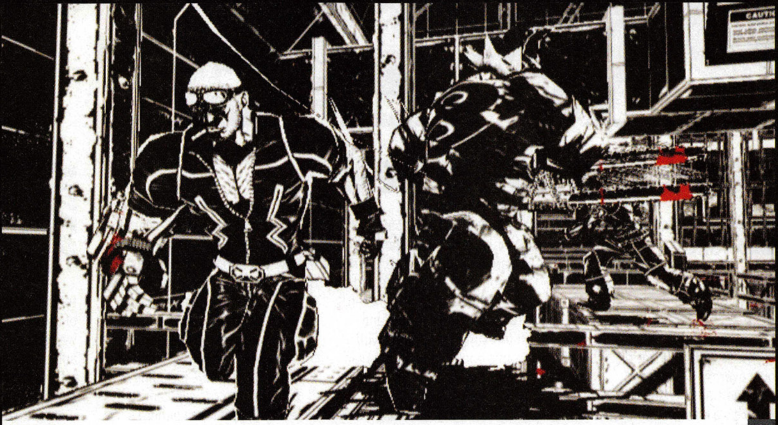
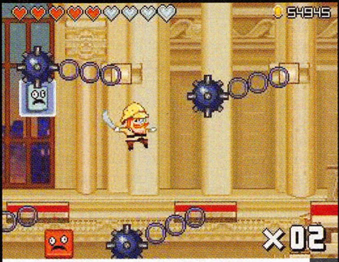
What's black and white and awesome all over? MadWorld.



MADWORLD 82



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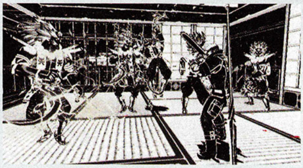
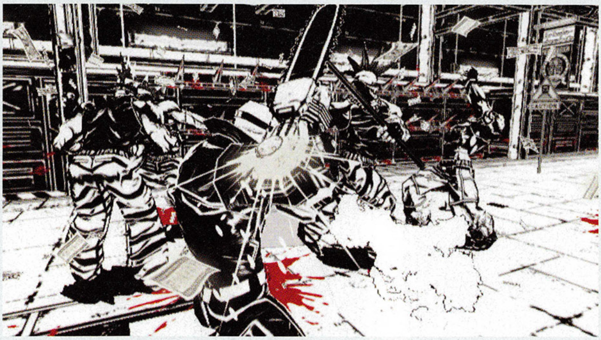
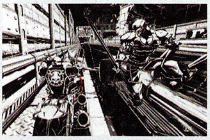






Paint the Town Red

MADWORLD

RATING: 9.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **PLATINUMGAMES**
ESRB: **MATURE**

If you've followed any of our coverage of Sega and PlatinumGames's MadWorld, you know it's a Mature-rated, ultraviolent romp that's aimed squarely at the hardcore gamer. It allows you to ram a signpost through a person's head. It has a minigame called Man Darts in which you use a baseball bat to smash your opponents onto a giant dartboard. Even the title screen features a chainsaw splashed with blood. Suffice it to say, MadWorld is definitely not for kids.

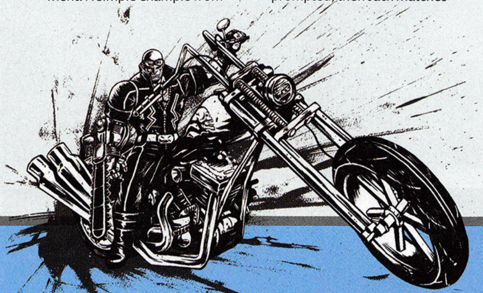
Although the game is unquestionably brutal, the violence is so over-the-top that it's more humorous than gruesome. Think of it as slapstick comedy taken to the extreme. Everything is so stylized, so far removed from our reality, that the blood becomes essentially splatters of red paint, providing the only real vibrant color (except for the occasional bits of yellow) to the otherwise black-and-white *Sin City*-style world in which protagonist Jack resides.

Jack is a bounty hunter who travels to Jefferson Island, which becomes isolated at the beginning of the game due to all the bridges surrounding the island being destroyed, to participate in the *Running Man*-esque game show *Death Watch*. Of course, the real reason he's there is revealed as you play (no spoilers here!). The story is compelling and interestingly presented with comic-book-like panels. To win the game, you have to hack and slash your way through 14 levels. It's a bit like another stylishly violent Wii game, No More Heroes, in that you're eliminating a series of memorable bosses to become the top dog. MadWorld, however, has a lot more going on in terms of the gameplay. Jack can eliminate enemies by using impermanent weapons such as spiked baseball bats, golf clubs, and daggers or by throwing his foes into anything from jet turbines to electrified signs to toilets to... well, let's just say that there are some other clever and surprising ways to dispatch baddies as the game progresses. Adding to the festivities, you can rack up more points by dishing out incredible amounts of punishment. A simple example from the tutorial is wrapping a large tire around a guy, jamming a pole through his head, then picking him up and repeatedly slamming him into a wall of spikes. Overkill? Certainly, but finding new ways to execute enemies helps keep the gameplay fresh. (The level variety—including a couple of motorcycle-centric levels—doesn't hurt either.)

Fortunately, the controls are intuitive and the gesture mechanics work pretty well. You can shake the Nunchuk to dodge attacks and swing the Wii Remote horizontally for a spinning back fist or vertically for an uppercut. If you hold B, you'll ready your chainsaw, then you can swing the Remote to slice either vertically or horizontally. At certain context-sensitive instances (such as during boss battles), you'll have to match the onscreen indicators in what are basically motion-controlled quick-time events. Even this doesn't feel unnatural, though; you swing the Remote and/or Nunchuk a certain way when prompted, then Jack matches that motion in the game. Most of the time it doesn't feel like waggling for the sake of waggling, and the game is, thankfully, pretty forgiving in registering your movements.

Despite taking only five to seven real-world hours to beat (don't believe the in-game clock that says it takes half that), MadWorld's only real flaw is not its length—after all, that's a good amount of time for a beat-'em-up, and you can go back to get higher scores as well as unlock new weapons and a higher difficulty level—but rather the running commentary. John Di Maggio (the voice of Bender from *Futurama*) and Greg Proops (the voice of the English-speaking pod-race announcer in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, which unintentionally adds to the humor) do an admirable job overall, but while their dialogue is often funny and risqué, it can become annoying when you hear the exact same banter over and over again as you progress.

It says a lot that repetitive commentary is the only really irritating part of the game, though. Everything else about MadWorld is, while not necessarily perfect, highly entertaining. For any hardcore gamer, this one is not to be missed. **—JUSTIN C.**



WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT GAMES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE EMERGE FROM THE PROPOSED SQUARE ENIX/EIDOS MERGER?

Justin Cheng

I think a new Legacy of Kain game in which Raziel and Kain team up with Vincent Valentine could be pretty awesome.

Chris Hoffman

I'll go with the obvious answer: Tifa Lockhart as an alternate character skin in Tomb Raider. And I wouldn't mind seeing a Gunblade in Hitman....

Casey Loe

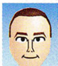
I just want to see Eidos finish Thief 4 and Deus Ex 3. Sign those checks, Square Enix, and get out of the way!

Chris Shepperd

Deus Ex was already part RPG, part FPS. The franchise is tailor-made for the combined talents of the two companies.

George Sinfield

I don't know. Slime Raider?



Chris Slate

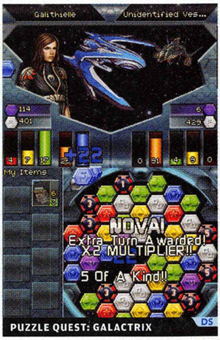
Shadow and Interceptor from Final Fantasy VI would make great secret additions to Mini Ninjas.

David F. Smith

Since everything's getting a handheld strategy-RPG spinoff now, have the former Quest team members make a Tomb Raider Tactics.

Steve Thomason

Herdy Gerdy with Chocobos? Who cares? What's more important is that you buy the game to your left. It's one of the very best Wii offerings to date.



PUZZLE QUEST: GALACTRIX

PUZZLE QUEST: GALACTRIX

RATING: **8.0**

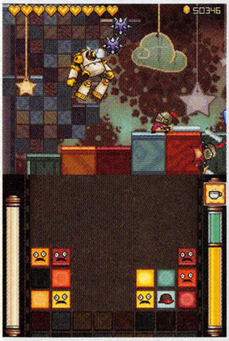
PLATFORM: **DS**
DEVELOPER: **INFINITE INTERACTIVE**
PUBLISHER: **D3PUBLISHER**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

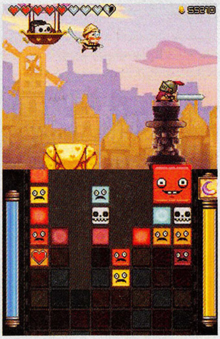
Puzzle Quest's genius is taking a simple puzzle concept and deepening it with RPG elements like story and character leveling. Most importantly, puzzles are transformed into intense one-on-one battles, and in Galactrix, you're captain of an intergalactic starship trying to stop an aggressive force of human clones from decimating all other life.

Opponents take turns swapping adjacent gems on a single board, and for every gem matched you gain corresponding energy; blue replenishes shields and red powers weapons, for example. You can equip items like lasers (direct damage!) and shield boosters (or disruptors to jam enemy shields). Customizing your ship with increasingly powerful gadgets is not only addicting but totally satisfying.

You'll face plenty of non-battle puzzles, too. Access new star systems by feverishly matching gems in sequence before time expires, or mine asteroids for resources by filling a quota before you run out of moves. These variations are definitely fun, but the downside is that they take a bit too much time away from combat.

The battle ratio in story mode is a small matter though, considering there's a quick battle option that allows you to face off anytime against an evenly-matched enemy. Or better yet, find a space-faring friend to exchange laser fire with via local multiplayer. **—CAROLYN G.**





Good Show!

HENRY HATSWORTH IN THE PUZZLING ADVENTURE

RATING: **8.0**

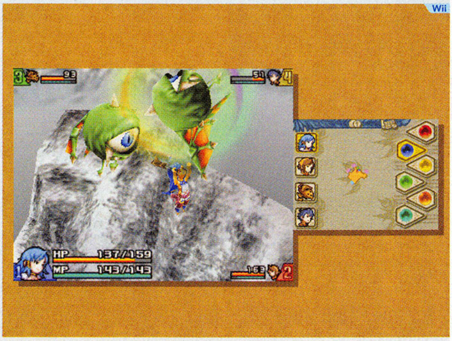
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA TIBURON**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

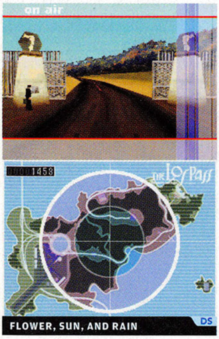
Henry Hatsworth's offbeat adventure unfolds in two games at once: a traditional platformer on the Nintendo DS's upper screen and a Bejeweled-esque puzzler on the lower screen. Neither game is particularly great on its own, but the two intersect in clever ways to become much more than the sum of their parts.

Enemies and power-ups from the upper screen fall to the lower screen, and success at the puzzle fills a meter that can restore Henry Hatsworth's youth and vigor, allow him to use projectile attacks, and enable a transformation into a mighty steam-powered mech. The action pauses when you're in the puzzle, so the game doesn't require the sort of frantic back-and-forth that, say, The World Ends with You does. But the split gameplay does provide plenty of excitement, because when you run into trouble on the upper screen, you always have a chance to turn things around with a good run at the puzzle.

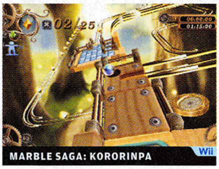
The platformer puts a heavy emphasis on combat, with many levels dragged down by tiresome monster rooms where you're stuck fighting multiple waves of enemies. The boss confrontations are a lot more interesting, as each has a complicated pattern and plenty of interesting ways to mess with your puzzle. The bosses are also quite tough—the game's content may be family-friendly, but the high level of challenge suggests the developers were aiming for a more experienced audience. (Or maybe they just didn't want players blowing through the game in a day.)

Whatever your age, you'll get a kick out of the game's story. Genteel adventurer Henry Hatsworth makes for an appealing lead, and the game's dialogue is sharply written and hilariously acted (if you want to call a random loop of guttural Britishisms "acting"). I hope we'll see more from this Hatsworth chap. **—CASEY L.**

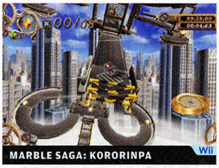




FLOWER, SUN, AND RAIN



MARBLE SAGA: KORORINPA



MARBLE SAGA: KORORINPA

Two for One

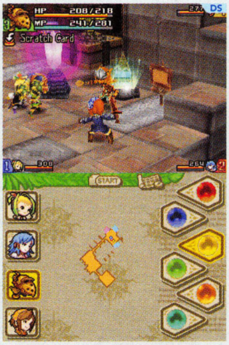
FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: ECHOES OF TIME

RATING: **6.0** (Wii VERSION), **6.5** (DS VERSION)

PLATFORM: **Wii, DS**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Echoes of Time follows closely in the footsteps of last year's Crystal Chronicles game, Ring of Fates. It's once again a Diablo-style action-RPG in which up to four players spend the majority of their time traipsing through dungeons and collecting loot. Aside from some minor enhancements, such as the introduction of a world map and a streamlined magic system, little of the basic formula has changed. The big news is that a Wii version accompanies the DS release this time around, and owners of either version can play together locally or online. It's a neat idea, but unfortunately the Wii rendition is little more than an awkward port of the DS game. The way it mimics the dual-screened handheld by splitting the television screen into two separate windows is inelegant to say the least, and although the visuals may be cutting-edge for DS, they look downright archaic on a home console. Both iterations are the same price ($40), but portability and touch-screen functionality give the DS game the edge.

Beyond that, the quest itself is solid if unspectacular. Ring of Fates devotees looking to scratch that particular itch will likely be satisfied, and the addition of online play makes it easier than ever to assemble a party. Plus, the number of items you can craft is staggering, some clever puzzles provide a nice break from combat, and the story, though relatively simple, is quite charming. But misguided platforming elements, a forgettable soundtrack, and repetitive dungeon design prevent Echoes of Time from living up to true Final Fantasy standards. **—STEVE T.**



FLOWER, SUN, AND RAIN

RATING: **6.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT USA/ XSEED GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **GRASSHOPPER**
ESRB: **TEEN**

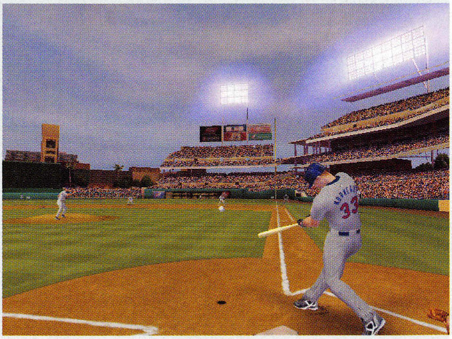
This walk-and-talk detective story with odd characters, obscure clues, and limited interaction (originally released in 2001 for the PS2 in Japan) reveals what designer Suda51 was up to before unleashing Killer 7. It centers on "searcher" Sumio Mondo's attempt to stop an airplane from exploding over an island resort. The explosion does happen, though, as the same day repeats itself while Mondo is caught up in small mysteries in and around the resort. Though the setup sounds like a terrorist-plot-tinged *Groundhog Day*, the 18 scenarios play out more like scenes from *The Shining*. Hotel staff and residents make cryptic requests (using the same electronic grumble that subbed for voice acting in Killer 7) as each day's puzzles boil down to Mondo "jacking in" to a person or object and tapping numerical solutions into his computer, Catherine. Chapter structure is severely linear, but the DS-version addition of an optional search for 50 items (about three per day) provides much-needed variety and a chance for exploration. Still, side quests come down to finding the right plug for jacking in to something, and then inputting a number. The noninteractive sequences are often beautiful and dreamy, and the dialogue is funny in a slow-burn kind of way. Unless you're a Suda51 completist, though, you'll likely find Flower, Sun, and Rain to be little more than an artfully executed curiosity. **—GEORGE S.**

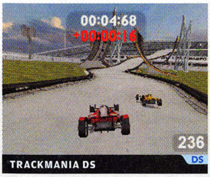
MARBLE SAGA: KORORINPA

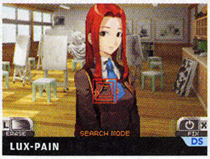
RATING: **7.5**

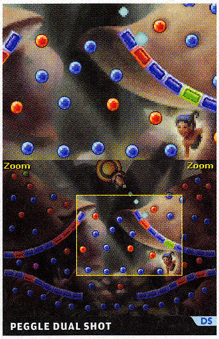
PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

With more-responsive controls and a better sense of friction than its 2007 predecessor, Marble Saga: Kororinpa is a step up for the simple-but-fun series. Marble Saga is less about struggling to guide your marble and more about navigating increasingly complex stages; you'll frequently find yourself turning the world completely on its side (which, unfortunately, can result in awkward camera angles) and performing Wii Remote gymnastics to overcome tough obstacles. Like the original Kororinpa, Marble Saga starts easy but quickly becomes deceptively difficult, and there is a ton of content to test your skill and patience—the main game is easily twice as big as its predecessor, plus you can create your own stages and play levels specifically designed for the Balance Board. The tacked-on story is unnecessary, however, and the music isn't as good as that of the original. **—CHRIS H.**









Sophomore Slump

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K9

RATING: **6.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **2K SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **VISUAL CONCEPTS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

2K's MLB franchise made its Wii debut last season, and though the rookie effort was pretty rough around the edges, it showed considerable promise. Unfortunately, the series has failed to make any significant strides in its sophomore campaign. As a matter of fact, you have to dig pretty deep to find any noteworthy differences aside from the updated rosters. There's still no online play, the graphics are virtually indistinguishable from last year's game (which is to say they're not very good), and the Franchise mode's interface remains extremely cumbersome. Plus, for every issue that *has* been addressed, you'll find a new fly in the ointment. The frequency with which balls leave the park is a lot more realistic, for instance, but now runners beat out far too many infield grounders. And though the annoying check swing mechanic from last year has been eliminated, batting feels much more difficult overall. Every CPU pitcher is able to consistently nibble at the corners like he's the reincarnation of Cy Young, and now you have to aim your swing at one of nine squares that make up the strike zone. Hardcore baseball fans will be equally irritated by the AI's often-bewildering management decisions, like batting Ichiro fifth or having Mark Buehrle pitch two innings of relief before starting the next day.

Despite my disappointment with its lack of progress, MLB 2K9 is a solid game of baseball. The pitching mechanics are excellent, fielding offers just enough assistance to keep frustrations at a minimum without taking away too much control, and Franchise mode contains plenty of depth for would-be general managers. I just hope a bit more work goes into next year's Wii game so the series can finally start to realize its potential. **—STEVE T.**

TRACKMANIA DS

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **FIREBRAND**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

French PC racing series TrackMania turns gearheads into track designers with a focus on course building instead of car customization. In the franchise's DS debut, the initial track-editing choices are limited to simple straights and curves, however, and early efforts spent navigating the advanced track-piece menu categories are a frustrating waste of time. Luckily, it doesn't take long to earn enough cash while racing on the game's more than 100 prebuilt tracks to buy obstacles, loops, and jumps. The drag-and-drop editor interface is easy to manage, but camera control is awkward if you're left-handed, and it's too easy to destroy established track elements while putting down new pieces. Clever Puzzle challenges incorporate track building with racing while Platform and Race events test your driving abilities in short, fun bursts. **—GEORGE S.**

LUX-PAIN

RATING: **4.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **IGNITION**
DEVELOPER: **KILLAWARE**
ESRB: **TEEN**

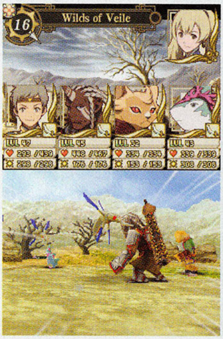
Dismal themes (suicide, animal torture) abound in this text-heavy visual adventure, in which your psychic protagonist reads minds in an effort to eliminate powerful worms created by negative feelings. In the game this amounts to a truly interminable amount of reading, as you'll spend hours upon hours listening to city denizens and have only the rare opportunity to determine the course of the conversation. Occasionally you'll use the stylus to rub out worms or tap icons in simplistic boss battles, but the game suffers from a lack of significant interactivity. It may look and—thanks to strong voice acting—sound like a potentially compelling anime series, but as a playable video game, Lux-Pain is a nonstarter. **—ANDREW H.**

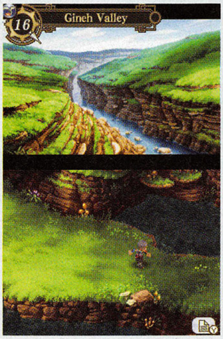
PEGGLE DUAL SHOT

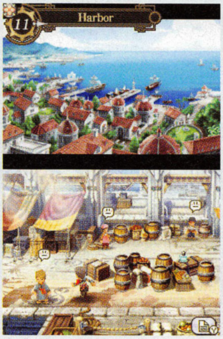
RATING: **8.5**

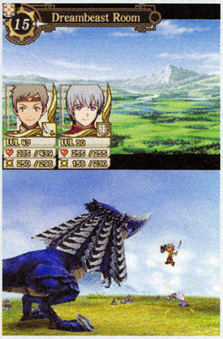
PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **POPCAP**
DEVELOPER: **Q ENTERTAINMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Think of Peggle as a mixture of pinball and Plinko from *The Price Is Right*, only your goal is to use a silver ball to hit and eliminate all of the orange pegs on the board. It's addictive, as all great puzzle games should be, but what makes Peggle truly extraordinary is its style, from the talking unicorns and flowers and eight other characters (all of whom have unique power-ups) to the playing of "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 when you beat a level. By bundling both Peggle and Peggle Nights (both previously released on PC) and adding 10 new levels designed by Q Entertainment, Dual Shot is quite a good value. It's a shame that the game has only pass-the-DS multiplayer, though. **—JUSTIN C.**









Army of One Hundred and Eight

SUIKODEN: TIERKREIS

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

There's no shortage of RPGs in which a small band of heroes battles a villainous army, but only the Suikoden series allows you to meet the threat with an army of your own. It's impressive that the developers of Suikoden: Tierkreis have been able to continue the series' tradition of 108 recruitable characters in a tiny DS card, but the game suffers from a lack of interesting things for those characters to do.

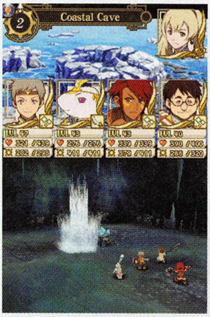
Tierkreis is a heavily story-driven game, and may well hold the records for the most text and voice of any DS title. Fortunately, the story is a good one, mixing the usual political intrigue and personal triumphs with a unique sci-fi twist that involves mysterious collisions between parallel dimensions. The game's characters are memorable and mostly likable, no small feat in a game with a cast of hundreds. (The voice work is hit or miss, though, with mostly good performances but a few stinkers in, sadly, very large roles.) Longtime fans of the series may be disappointed with the family-friendly tone—Tierkreis pulls its punches by sparing most of the tragic deaths, painful betrayals, and hard decisions that previous installments reveled in. Fans should also be prepared for a story that stands completely on its own, requiring no knowledge of the series' numbered installments and adding nothing to the existing mythology. But as much as any previous Suikoden story, Tierkreis nails the thrilling experience of evolving from a punk kid with a few friends to the lord of a massive castle and the commander of a diverse and powerful army.

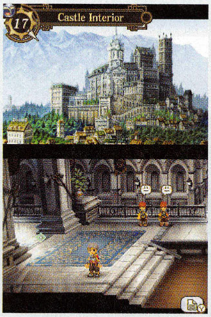
Unfortunately, Tierkreis doesn't get a whole lot else right. Exploring your world is a terrible bore, with random encounters that trigger every few seconds and offer little in the way of strategic depth, and virtually no challenge. Having a giant roster of characters sounds fun, but selecting abilities and equipment for each of them is a hassle, especially with the game's clumsy interface. Previous Suikoden installments have justified the large roster by featuring some sort of secondary strategy game in which you could put them all to good use, but there's nothing of the sort in Tierkreis. Large-scale encounters do allow you to assemble multiple parties, but they still use only a tiny fraction of your army.

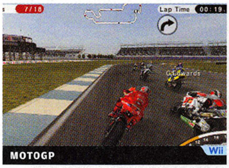
Tierkreis's world is restricted to a series of selectable areas on a map, and towns offer a menu of locations to visit, which is not a satisfying alternative to free exploration. At least each individual area looks and sounds great, with beautifully drawn backgrounds and fantastic tunes that in many cases surpass the CD-based soundtrack of past installments. The production values also get a boost from frequent snippets of high-quality animation that chronicle the story's most significant events.

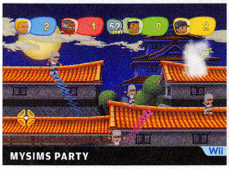
It was wise of Konami to stick this game with a subtitle instead of a number, because this is not the Suikoden VI fans have been waiting for. It has always been a challenge for the series to mesh the joys of recruiting a large army with game mechanics that put the characters to good use, and the developers of this installment have done a lousy job of it. While it's still fun to search out and recruit new characters for storyline reasons, the excessive encounter rate makes revisiting old dungeons a chore, and the characters you recruit do little more than gum up the game's menus. But as much as I grumble about its flaws, Tierkreis's epic scope and engaging narrative did keep me playing, eager to see what would happen next.

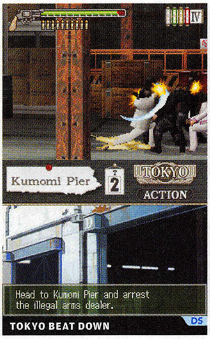
—CASEY L.



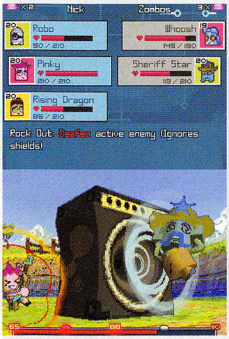




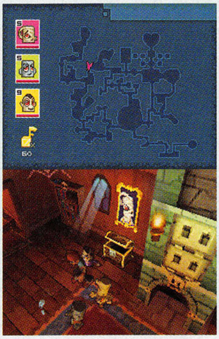




Head to Kumomi Pier and arrest the illegal arms dealer.



Rock Out: Deafen active enemy (Ignores shields)



MOTOGP

RATING: 4.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **MILESTONE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

We've been dying for a good racing sim on Wii, but this isn't it. Sure, MotoGP has licensed bikes, teams, riders, and courses, but it's lacking an essential ingredient: fun. Generally, fun in a racer is derived from a combination of good controls, a thrilling sense of speed, and the ability to keep your vehicle on the road. MotoGP fails in all three areas. It's frustrating, looks very dated, has tinny sound effects that will drive you bonkers, and no matter what control scheme or handling type—from arcade to simulation—you choose, the result is a game that you'll end up fighting more than enjoying. The gimmick of tilting the Wii Remote like handlebars is as engaging as this game gets. **—RANDY N.**

MYSIMS PARTY

RATING: 5.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

With 50 minigames to play (either by yourself or with up to three friends) and fairly robust character customization, MySims Party offers a good amount of variety. Unfortunately, many of those games aren't all that fun. The motion-controlled ones in particular can be annoying due to spotty gesture recognition. Thankfully, the non-waggle-centric events—where you either turn the Wii Remote sideways like an NES pad or point and click at the screen with the Remote—work fine. But even these start to wear thin due to their simplicity (though that's understandable since this is geared toward gamers of all ages and skill levels) and the fact that you have to play through many of the games repeatedly to unlock new ones. **—JUSTIN C.**

TOKYO BEAT DOWN

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **SUCCESS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

With its solid fighting mechanics, nice 3-D visuals, and potentially campy cop-show premise, Tokyo Beat Down could have been a quality beat-'em-up. And though it's got the basics down—the punch-kick-throw action is as good as any that's come out in the last few years—the game as a whole is unsatisfying. There's not much variety in the enemies, environments (you fight through each area numerous times), or moves; even though there are three playable characters, the only discernable difference between them is their throws. Guns are so weak that they add very little to the gameplay, and picking up items and talking to NPCs is clunky. The story wastes its potential, too; although the main character is appropriately over-the-top, the rest of the clichéd story takes itself too seriously and the cut-scenes are needlessly long-winded. **—CHRIS H.**

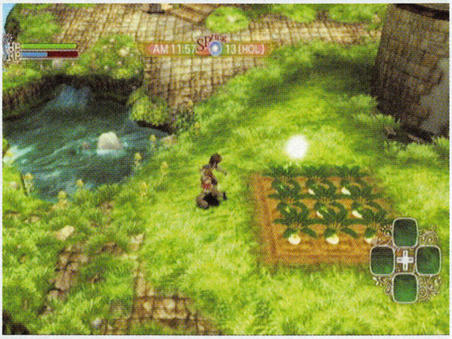
No Creature Comfort

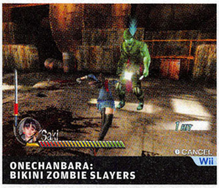
ZUBO

SCORE: 6.5

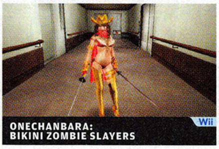
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CASUAL STUDIOS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Clearly aiming to be an introductory RPG in the Pokémon vein, Zubo features hordes of little eraser-shaped characters trying to act cute and tough at the same time. Pokémon works because it remains challenging and complex even as it caters to a young crowd. Zubo, however, is so simple, particularly in combat, that it makes Pokémon battles look like a Mensa evaluation. To Zubo's credit, the attack animations are much more humorous and fun to watch than the typical Pokémon ones. The rhythm-based fighting mechanic—the better you do at tapping the screen to a rhythm, the more damage you inflict—would be a lot better if there were an actual musical rhythm to match. Instead you must rely only on your eyes rather than your ears, which kind of defeats the purpose of a rhythm aspect. The exploration parts of Zubo are fun, if a little linear; the graphics are pretty good for a DS game, and moving the character around via the touch screen works well nearly all the time. It's too bad the story loses focus so quickly that you're never sure where you are or what you're doing—you're just hopping from one side quest to another, frequently jumping into battles with monsters that look precisely like the last 100 you fought. In all, Zubo is simply too long, too meandering, and doesn't have any spirit—lifeless jokes and boring enemies turn a promising game into an elaborate chore. **—CHRIS SH.**

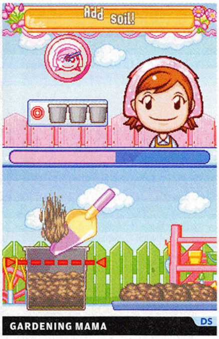




ONECHANBARA: BIKINI ZOMBIE SLAYERS Wii



ONECHANBARA: BIKINI ZOMBIE SLAYERS Wii



GARDENING MAMA DS

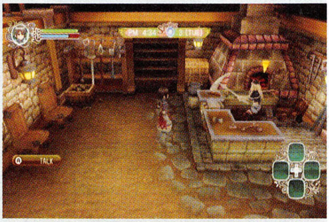
Bet the Farm

RUNE FACTORY FRONTIER

RATING: **7.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT USA/ XSEED GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **MARVELOUS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Like its DS predecessors, Rune Factory Frontier deftly mixes the romantic notion of farming (à la Harvest Moon) with the excitement and epic nature of a fantasy action-RPG. There's no lack of things to do in Frontier—exploring dungeons, fighting monsters, growing crops, forging weapons, crafting accessories, cooking food, catching and raising beasts, fishing, expanding your house, dating numerous eligible bachelorettes, and much more. The variety of tasks keeps things interesting, and all of them are handled well from a gameplay perspective; combat is simple and fun, and the farming duties are equally intuitive. It's too bad the optional motion controls don't add anything to the experience. Fans of the previous Rune Factory games will appreciate the return of numerous characters, and they'll also be better prepared for the game's leisurely pace: Though the action quotient makes Frontier more palatable than other farming games to a broad range of gamers, advancement through the story is often painfully slow. There are frequently no clear objectives, and you can play for hours on end with little sense of progress. Patient players, however, will find a lot to enjoy; there are loads of optional scenarios, and your character may eventually have the opportunity to get married and start a family. In addition, the game looks very nice; it doesn't exactly push the Wii hardware, but the visuals are lush and detailed, and brief anime cut-scenes punctuate key moments. Rune Factory Frontier isn't for everybody, but it delivers on its promise of providing a deep, engrossing experience while letting you live a relaxing life. —**CHRIS H.**



ONECHANBARA: BIKINI ZOMBIE SLAYERS

RATING: **6.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **D3PUBLISHER**
DEVELOPER: **TAMSOFT**
ESRB: **MATURE**

If you have no idea what the first part of this game's name means (something close to "young-woman swordfighting"), don't sweat it—the subtitle says it all. Playing as one of two sisters, you'll slice, punch, and rip apart hundreds if not thousands of zombies throughout the game's multiple play modes. Better yet, you'll do it in a bikini and cowboy hat (or if you play the other sister, a schoolgirl outfit).

Despite—or maybe because of—the ridiculous premise, Onechanbara can be quite fun. There are 20 to 30 enemies onscreen at almost all times, and chopping them to pieces using the Wii Remote is strangely satisfying. Take note, though: this game is not for kids or the faint of heart. Just about every second of this game has the screen, your sword, and your body covered in zombie blood.

Unfortunately, Onechanbara can't escape its low-production-value roots (in Japan the game is part of a line of budget titles). There's almost no real storytelling, the missions are anything but diverse, and even the text and menus look like a bad PowerPoint presentation. Perhaps the worst aspect of the game, though, is the lack of difficulty. It's so easy we didn't die once throughout the entire game. It's a shame, really, because the Survival mode would be great otherwise.

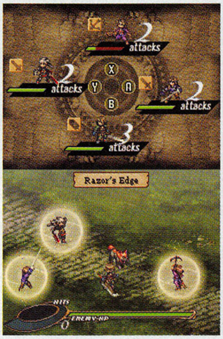
Still, Onechanbara's two-player co-op mode makes the game great when you and a friend are looking for some mindless zombie-slaying action with little commitment. A host of unlockables and a $30 price tag don't hurt, either. —**KAISER H.**

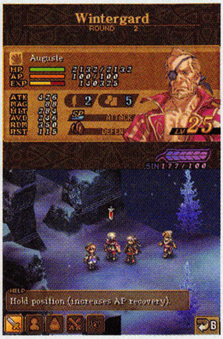
GARDENING MAMA

RATING: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **COOKING MAMA LTD.**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Since Gardening Mama sticks to the same fast-paced minigame-oriented formula as Cooking Mama, I suspected it was going to be good, but it actually exceeded my expectations. Who knew there was so much to do in a garden? Admittedly, mixing soil, planting seeds, spraying pesticide, and trimming dead leaves could have been boring, but the minigames are more arcadelike and skill-based than those in the recent Cooking Mama titles, which keeps things fun. The game structure, which has you visiting various parts of your garden via a map and returning to plants to maintain their growth, sometimes in emergency situations, is a big improvement too. Some activities do get old—watering plants comes up way too often—but there's a lot of crop variety and lots to unlock. If you liked Cooking Mama, give this one a try. —**CHRIS H.**


2 attacks
2 attacks
2 attacks
3 attacks
Razor's Edge


Wintergard
ROUND 2
Auguste
Hold position (increases AP recovery).

If You Want Blood...

VALKYRIE PROFILE: COVENANT OF THE PLUME

RATING: **9.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SQUARE ENIX**
DEVELOPER: **TRI-ACE**
RATING: **TEEN**

This is an awfully depressing game. That's not a value judgment, but unless you're immune to ordinary human feelings, it's an accurate statement of fact. The things that you'll see in Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume, and more important, many of the things that you'll do, are grim enough to ruin your whole day.

The goal of most strategy-RPGs is to kill your enemies, after all, but here the goal is to visit them with as much needless violence as possible. Likewise, sacrificing an ally on the way to victory is nothing new, but Covenant of the Plume offers the diabolical option to give them supercharged powers for the duration of a single battle... after which they unavoidably die.

Nobody ever said an RPG had to be a romp through a candy-colored fantasyland, though, and while this game is a downer sometimes, it's an exceptionally well-made one. Yes, it's another strategy hybrid—a genre the DS has plenty of these days—but it mixes in elements from the Valkyrie Profile console games to create something that feels fresh and unique.

Covenant hangs on to all the best elements from its predecessors' battle system, where timing a party's attacks appropriately lets you string out an offensive with tons of bonus damage. Those mechanics fit neatly underneath a traditional strategy-RPG battlefield; every character in range of a target simply becomes a member of the attacking party.

Likewise, this is a Valkyrie Profile game in every other important way. Somber, detailed visuals match a toned-down soundtrack from Motoi Sakuraba, and while the English script is a little too flowery sometimes, the characters and their story are still engaging and involving. Something like redemption waits at the very end, too, though you'll live through a lot of misery to get there.

—DAVID S.

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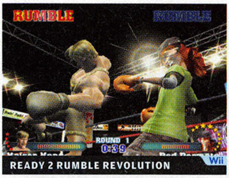
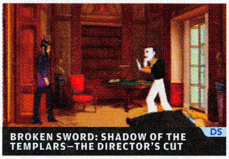
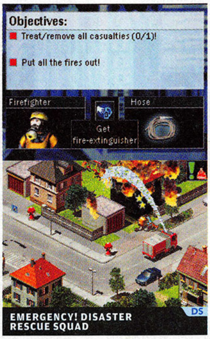


READY 2 RUMBLE REVOLUTION

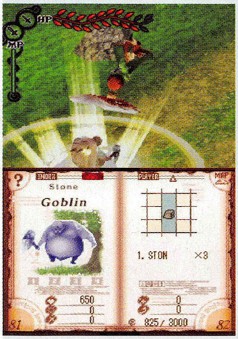


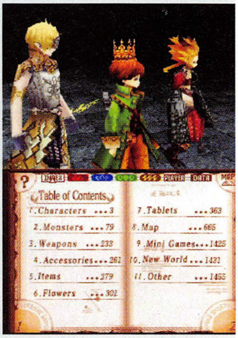
BROKEN SWORD: SHADOW OF THE TEMPLARS—THE DIRECTOR'S CUT



Objectives:
Treat/remove all casualties (0/1)!
Put all the fires out!

EMERGENCY! DISASTER RESCUE SQUAD





READY 2 RUMBLE REVOLUTION

RATING: **5.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ATARI**
DEVELOPER: **AKI**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Ready 2 Rumble Revolution is a new spin on a fairly fun series, which pits parodies of B-grade stars against one another in the ring. The game's presentation is fun and suitably in-your-face, its create-a-boxer mode turns out some interesting personae, and there's a variety of minigames and multiplayer game types. But although its heart is in the right place, its gameplay—beyond the most basic Wii Remote-and-Nunchuk-produced punches—is tedious. Remembering how to perform the multitude of punches is part of the problem; actually getting them to register in the ring is another. The same frustration is present in the training games, which never seem to like your movements. Unfortunately, they're a requirement in the career mode. It's hard to enjoy your bouts when your biggest fight is against the controls. —RANDY N.

ALSO THIS MONTH

For the second month in a row, Capcom opted not to send us a copy of **Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop** (Wii) for review—not a good sign, especially since the game will be out by the time you read this. You'd think the Resident Evil 4 engine, Wii controls, and a shopping mall full of zombies would be a match made in heaven, but that wasn't the case the last time we played it; the lack of weapon variety, low number of enemies, and overemphasis on shooting were especially problematic. We're calling this one dead on arrival.... On the other hand, we still have high hopes for Ubisoft's **Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars—The Director's Cut** for Wii and DS. It's an enhanced version of the classic point-and-click adventure.... Take2's **Don King Boxing** (Wii & DS) has a strong license and a unique story, but we're not quite sold on the gameplay.... One of the most acclaimed footy series ever returns to Wii with Konami's **Pro Evolution Soccer 2009**. Hopefully it lives up to the franchise's legacy.... The presentation in The Game Factory's DS title **World Championship Games** isn't too hot, but it does have plenty of events and a Track & Field vibe.... Can't get enough Guitar Hero? Then check out Activision's **Guitar Hero: Metallica** for Wii, featuring 45 new tracks played and picked by the world-renowned band.... EA's **MySims Party** for Wii received a pretty mediocre review this issue, but there's also a DS version in the works.... If you played Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir, you know what kind of visual puzzles to expect in Destineer's **Cate West: The Vanishing Files** for Wii. Muddy graphics, however, make the game a chore.... Destineer also has **Emergency! Disaster Rescue Squad** on tap for DS. The unique title is similar to a real-time strategy game, only you're saving lives instead of fighting enemies.

Slice and Splice

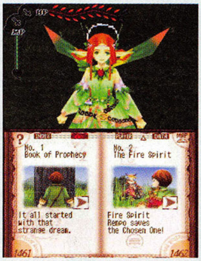
AVALON CODE

RATING: **8.5**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **MARVELOUS ENTERTAINMENT USA/ XSEED GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **MARVELOUS/MATRIX**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Avalon Code brings a traditional action-RPG to the top screen of your Nintendo DS, featuring exceptional 3-D graphics and a smooth combat system with a varied arsenal of weapons. But the exploring and monster-slaying takes a backseat to what's happening on the lower screen, where you'll find the 1,490-page *Book of Prophecy*. The book is the source of all your gear, the solution to every puzzle, and the key that unlocks scores of side quests. You'll fill it with information on every area, character, monster, and item you encounter, and then use your stylus to mess with the entries by mixing up the pieces of their DNA-esque "codes." Carefully snipping and pasting codes can heal sickly townsfolk, cripple powerful monsters, and transform copper blades into flaming swords of legend. The process of archiving your world and tweaking each entry is oddly addictive and unlike anything I've played before.

The *Book of Prophecy* is a great idea, and it's far from the game's only left-field innovation. But not all of them are so successful—I wasn't a big fan of the dungeons full of timed puzzle rooms, nor of the system that forces you to repeatedly juggle enemies to earn badly needed recovery items. The game also flubs some of the basics, combining button functions in annoying ways and sapping the fun from its combat with instantly respawning enemies. But if the price of creative ideas is a lack of refinement, then it's one I'm willing to pay. Avalon Code is sort of a mess, but it's an inspired one. —CASEY L.


HP
MP
INDEX
PLAYER
DATA
MAP
No. 1
Book of Prophecy
It all started with that strange dream.
No. 2
The Fire Spirit
Fire Spirit Rempo saves the Chosen One!
1461
1462

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NINTENDO POWER

Wii
THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD: OVERKI
First look at the series' new Wii-exclusive
NINTENDO POWE
WARIO LAND: SHAKE IT!
OLD-SCHO
COOL
Wii takes 2-D g
new heights in
next great platfor
Wii
DEAD RISING: CHOP TILL YOU DROP
The blockbuster zombie series comes to Wii
NINTENDO POWER
HANDS-ON
WARIO LAND: SHAKE IT!
&
MARIO SUPER SLUGGERS
FINALLY!
CHRONO TRIGGER
Returns for DS!
EXCLUSIVE!
GHOSTBUSTERS: THE VIDEO GAME
First Wii and DS hands-on!
LEGO BA
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Future
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SONIC & THE BLACK KNIGHT
The Blue Blur swings cold steel in his big new Wii-exclusive adventure

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[REVIEWS ARCHIVE]

Good Times

Last issue was a nice change of pace when it came to reviewing games. It was still a relatively quiet month, quantity-wise, but of the nine games reviewed, five were definitely great. Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon (DS) and Dragon Quest V (DS) earned 8.5s, and The House of the Dead: Overkill (Wii), Sonic and the Black Knight (Wii), and Blue Dragon Plus (DS) got 8.0s.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Wii				
AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack	N/A	MTV Games	237	T
Alone in the Dark	4.0	Atari	232	M
• Animal Crossing: City Folk	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Backyard Baseball '09	N/A	Atari	231	E
Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy	8.5	Majesco	229	E
Boogie SuperStar	7.0	Electronic Arts	235	E10+
Boom Blox	8.0	Electronic Arts	229	E
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	7.0	Ubisoft	235	M
• Call of Duty: World at War	8.0	Activision	237	M
• Castlevania Judgment	7.0	Konami	236	T
Celebrity Sports Showdown	4.5	EA Sports	235	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	T
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	6.5	Majesco	236	E
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2	8.0	Konami	234	E10+
de Blob	8.0	THQ	234	E
Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop	N/A	Capcom	239	M
Deadly Creatures	7.5	THQ	239	T
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.0	Eidos	230	T
Deca Sports	N/A	Hudson	229	E
Dokapon Kingdom	8.5	Atlus	235	E10+
Emergency Heroes	N/A	Ubisoft	230	E10+
FaceBreaker K.O. Party	5.0	Electronic Arts	235	T
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.5	System 3	233	E
FIFA Soccer 09 All-Play	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	7.5	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Fishing Master: World Tour	7.5	Hudson	238	E
• Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	7.0	RedOctane	232	T
• Guitar Hero World Tour	8.5	Activision	236	T
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.5	Natsume	233	E
The House of the Dead: Overkill	8.0	Sega	239	M
The Incredible Hulk	3.5	Sega	231	T
Iron Man	5.5	Sega	229	T
The King of Fighters: The Orochi Saga	8.0	SNK Playmore	235	T
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.0	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E10+
Line Rider 2: Unbound	5.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked	6.5	Konami	235	E10+
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
• Madden NFL 09 All-Play	9.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Mario Super Sluggers	7.5	Nintendo	233	E
MLB Power Pros 2008	7.0	2K Sports	232	E
Monster Lab	6.5	Eidos	236	E10+
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	8.0	Gamecock	236	E10+
MySims Kingdom	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2	8.0	Tomy	235	T
NASCAR Kart Racing	6.0	EA Sports	238	E
• NBA Live 09 All-Play	4.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
NCAA Football 09 All-Play	5.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Need for Speed Undercover	6.5	Electronic Arts	236	T
Neighborhood Games	N/A	THQ	238	E
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	N/A	Capcom	236	E
New Play Control! Mario Power Tennis	N/A	Nintendo	239	E
New Play Control! Pikmin	N/A	Nintendo	239	E
NHL 2K9	7.0	2K Sports	234	E10+
Order Up!	7.0	Zoo Games	232	E
Pop Star Guitar	N/A	XS Games	236	T
• Quantum of Solace	5.0	Activision	237	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	5.5	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Rock Band	8.0	MTV Games	231	T
• Rock Band 2	9.0	MTV Games	237	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1	6.5	MTV Games	232	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 2	N/A	MTV Games	237	T
Rock Revolution	4.5	Konami	235	T
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	7.0	Tecmo	236	T
Sam & Max Season One	7.0	The Adventure Company	233	T
• Samba de Amigo	9.0	Sega	234	E
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	7.0	Ubisoft	236	E10+
SimAnimals	N/A	Electronic Arts	238	E
SimCity Creator	6.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Skate It	6.0	Electronic Arts	237	E
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	8.5	SNK Playmore	233	T
Sonic and the Black Knight	8.0	Sega	239	E10+
Sonic Unleashed	8.0	Sega	236	E10+
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6.5	Activision	236	T
SPRay	3.0	Tecmo	235	E10+
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	4.0	LucasArts	236	T
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	LucasArts	233	T
Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World	8.0	Namco Bandai	236	T
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	7.0	Ubisoft	238	M
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour All-Play	8.5	Electronic Arts	233	E
TNA Impact!	5.0	Midway	235	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	7.0	Eidos	236	T
Top Spin 3	7.0	2K Sports	229	E
Ultimate Band	6.0	Disney	235	E
Ultimate Shooting Collection	N/A	UFO	237	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
Wario Land: Shake It!	8.0	Nintendo	234	E
We Cheer	6.0	Namco Bandai	235	E10+
• We Love Golf!	8.5	Capcom	231	E10+
We Ski	6.0	Namco Bandai	229	E
We Ski and Snowboard	6.5	Namco Bandai	239	E
• Wii Music	N/A	Nintendo	235	E
WordJong Party	N/A	Destineer	238	E
• WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	8.0	THQ	236	T
NINTENDO DS				
Age of Empires: Mythologies	7.0	THQ	236	E10+
Arkanoid DS	6.5	Square Enix	230	E
AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon	7.0	Majesco	235	E10+
Bangai-O Spirits	8.0	D3PA	232	E10+
Big Bang Mini	8.5	SouthPeak	237	E
Bleach: Dark Souls	8.5	Sega	234	T

REVIEWER NOTES

EXCITE TRUCK

I gained a new appreciation for this Wii launch title after replaying it for my ExciteBots feature this issue. While I usually enjoy arcade-style racers, I didn't fully click with the series' stunt-based, high-flying, car-crashing action until I delved into ExciteBots. When I went back to Excite Truck, it felt like I was seeing the game for the first time. While I much prefer the newer title, Excite Truck still packs some incredible offroad thrills. —**CHRIS SL.**

THE LEGEND OF SPYRO: DAWN OF THE DRAGON (Wii)

Great voice acting and an epic plot don't make up for this game's overly complex controls and sloppy combat. —CHRIS H.

CHRONO TRIGGER

I was going to try just a bit of Chrono Trigger for DS to see if it was really as good as I remembered (I hadn't played the game in nearly a decade), and I was pleasantly surprised to discover that it's actually even better. I was going to play for only a couple of hours, but I ended up playing through the whole thing. The fun battle system and the memorable characters, music, and story make this one of the best RPGs ever made. —**JUSTIN C.**

Blue Dragon Plus	8.0	Ignition	239	E
Boing! Docomodake DS	7.0	Ignition	239	E
Brain Quest Grades 3 & 4	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Brain Quest Grades 5 & 6	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Cake Mania 2	6.5	Majesco	230	E
• Call of Duty: World at War	N/A	Activision	236	T
Carnival Games	4.5	2K Games	231	E
• Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.0	Konami	235	T
The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity	5.0	Atari	238	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	E10+
Chrono Trigger	9.0	Square Enix	236	E10+
Civilization Revolution	7.5	2K Games	231	E10+
Code Lyoko: Fall of Xana	N/A	The Game Factory	230	E
Commando: Steel Disaster	N/A	XS Games	229	E10+
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E
Disgaea DS	7.5	NIS America	233	T
Dragon Ball: Origins	7.0	Atari	235	E
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7.5	Square Enix	233	E10+
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	8.5	Square Enix	239	E
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob Squarepants Edition	7.0	THQ	234	E
Drone Tactics	7.0	Atlus	229	E10+
Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero	7.0	Konami	237	E
Etrian Odyssey II: Heroes of Lagaard	8.5	Atlus	230	E10+
Exit DS	7.5	Square Enix	234	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	6.0	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy IV	9.0	Square Enix	231	E10+
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	7.0	Square Enix	230	E10+
• Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon	8.5	Nintendo	239	E10+
Gauntlet	7.5	Eidos	236	T
• GRID	8.5	Codemasters	230	E
Guitar Hero On Tour	8.0	Activision	232	E10+
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	7.0	Activision	237	E10+
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	7.0	Natsume	231	E
The Incredible Hulk	7.5	Sega	231	E10+
Iron Man	5.0	Sega	229	E10+
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	5.0	Atlus	232	T
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	5.0	Aksys	229	T
Kirby Super Star Ultra	9.0	Nintendo	234	E
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	7.5	Atlus	238	T
The Legend of Kage 2	8.0	Square Enix	234	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.5	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ	5.0	Destineer	235	T
Lock's Quest	7.0	THQ	234	E
Looney Tunes: Cartoon Conductor	6.5	Eidos	230	E
The Lord of the Rings: Conquest	5.0	Electronic Arts	238	E10+
Luminous Arc 2	7.0	Atlus	236	T
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E
Madden NFL 09	N/A	Electronic Arts	232	E
Master of the Monster Lair	6.5	Atlus	235	E10+
• Mega Man Star Force 2	7.0	Capcom	230	E
Metal Slug 7	7.5	Ignition	236	T
Mister Slime	6.0	SouthPeak	230	E
Monster Lab	8.0	Eidos	236	E10+
Moon	7.5	Mastiff	236	T
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	N/A	Vivendi Games	231	T
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	5.0	Gamecock	236	E
My DoItAll	N/A	Tomy	239	E
My World, My Way	7.0	Atlus	239	E
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	6.5	Nintendo	234	E
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	N/A	Majesco	232	E10+
• Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2	6.5	Tomy	234	E10+
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	6.0	Capcom	236	E
• New International Track and Field	8.0	Konami	232	E10+
Ninjatown	8.0	SouthPeak	235	E
Personal Trainer: Cooking	N/A	Nintendo	237	E
Personal Trainer: Math	N/A	Nintendo	239	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation	6.0	Koei	233	E
Populous	7.0	XSEED	234	T
• Prey the Stars	5.5	Koei	234	E10
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	7.0	Ubisoft	237	E
Princess on Ice	N/A	Aksys	235	E
Quantum of Solace	6.0	Activision	237	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Retro Game Challenge	8.0	XSEED	237	RP
Robocalypse	7.5	Tecmo	235	E10+
Rock Revolution	5.0	Konami	235	E10+
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rune Factory 2: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	7.0	Natsume	237	E
Shaun the Sheep	4.0	D3Publisher	235	E
Shaun White Snowboarding	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E
SimAnimals	N/A	Electronic Arts	238	E
• Skate It	5.5	Electronic Arts	237	E
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.0	Sega	234	E
Soul Bubbles	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E
Space Invaders Extreme	8.0	Square Enix	230	E
• Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals	8.0	Disney	235	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Spore Creatures	8.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	6.0	LucasArts	236	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6.0	LucasArts	233	T
Summon Night: Twin Age	7.5	Atlus	229	E10+
Super Dodgeball Brawlers	6.5	Aksys	229	E
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop 3	N/A	Namco Bandai	230	E
• Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	6.0	Tecmo	235	E
Theresia	N/A	Aksys	235	M
Time Hollow	7.0	Konami	234	T
• Tom Clancy's EndWar	N/A	Ubisoft	236	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	N/A	Eidos	236	T
Tony Hawk's Motion	4.0	Activision	237	E
Top Spin 3	6.0	2K Sports	229	E
Tornado	6.0	Ignition	234	E
Transformers Animated: The Game	7.0	Activision	235	E
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.5	Atlus	231	T
Unsolved Crimes	4.5	Empire	234	T
• Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise	7.0	THQ	234	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver	N/A	Atari	235	E
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	4.0	THQ	236	T
Zenses: Oceans	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Zenses: Rainforest	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E

DE BLOB

Unlike many of THQ's games, de Blob doesn't have a big-name license attached to it, but it's one of the publisher's best titles in recent memory. This platformer with artistic flair is full of quirky personality, and bringing the world to life through color is simply fun. The levels do feel rather similar, but if you value originality and creativity, don't miss this one. **—CHRIS H.**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

I realize that I'm a couple of years late to the conversation, but I only recently finished Twilight Princess and felt compelled to weigh in. Short of Ocarina of Time, this is the finest adventure ever crafted. **—STEVE T.**

MARIO STRIKERS CHARGED

I didn't get a chance to play a lot of Charged when the game first came out, and I only tried single-player matches, which were okay, but nothing to run around the room screaming "GOOOALLL!" about. This month, however, I finally tried a co-op match with a friend, and what a difference! I had a blast just blocking for him while he set up to score. If you haven't played this game with a buddy, go back and give it a second look. **—CHRIS SL.**

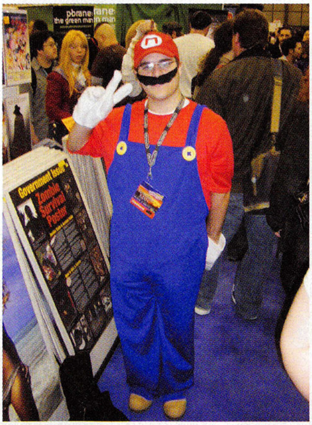
EVENTS

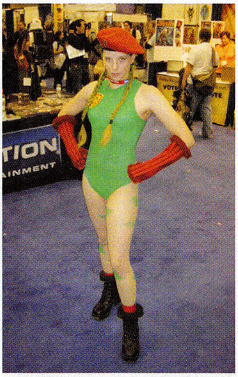
Dress to Impress

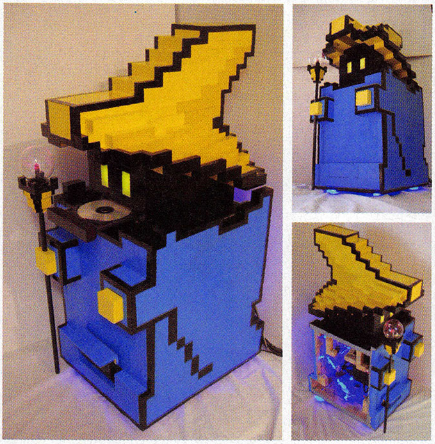
Cosplayers show off their video game enthusiasm at New York Comic Con.

Between checking out games at New York Comic Con in early February, we got a chance to meet some of the biggest video game fans out there—the ones who dress up like their favorite characters and walk around in public. Many Nintendo characters got the cosplay treatment. We ran into multiple Marios, an excellent Princess Peach, a Link or two, and even one adventurous girl dressed as Toad. The game series with the most representation was definitely Street Fighter, though, whose characters were very popular among female cosplayers. Our hats are off to all of you. Thanks for bringing your gaming love to the Big Apple! —**TOM H.**

NEW YORK COMIC CON







MOD JOB

Black-Magic-Powered PC

An iconic RPG character becomes a glorious amateur case mod.

Most people have to dig out their NES to get a glimpse at an 8-bit rendition of Final Fantasy's iconic Black Mage, but Richard Clinton just has to look at his computer. Not the monitor—*the actual case*.

Inspired by a love of the character and an interest in modifying a computer, the 22-year-old steam-boiler control operator from Boardman, Ohio set to work on a case mod that would bring the Black Mage to life in 3-D, all the while retaining its original 8-bit design sensibilities. "The reason I love the Black Mage is he is always fresh and exciting when playing a Final Fantasy, since he gains new spells constantly throughout the story," says Clinton, who cites the character's appearances in the 8-bit originals and Final Fantasy Tactics games as favorites.

After months of plotting and planning, Clinton began the construction process early last summer. Originally estimating a need for 600 one-inch cubes, Clinton ended up using about 2,000 cubes for the case; they were painstakingly glued together in pairs. Once he figured out how to assemble the sides of the case (the right side is in two pieces to allow access to the computer's innards), he set to work on the hat, which proved to be the most difficult part of the character to render with three-dimensional cubes.

Of course, the Black Mage has to house a fully functional computer, so slots in the back and on the bottom were necessary for fans. But custom-building the machine within meant Clinton could create some pretty impressive effects, such as having the disc tray pop out of the mage's mouth and using a USB-connected "plasma orb" to provide the flowing electricity for the Black Mage's Thunder Rod. Most amusing of all may be the location of the power button on the mage's right hand. "All I do is high five him to power up," jokes Clinton.

With painting help from his girlfriend, Clinton finished the case just in time to win a case-mod competition, and the Internet response from other gamers has been overwhelmingly positive. While originally conceived as a one-time project, the surprise success of the Black Mage mod has convinced Clinton to create a White Mage counterpart for his girlfriend—which we eagerly anticipate showing you in a future issue. —**ANDREW H.**

ABOVE *and* BEYOND

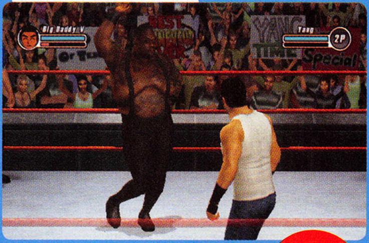
Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 1000 Marina Blvd., Suite 510, Brisbane, CA 94005. We'll run the best stuff in this section.

WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

There's just something surreal about seeing Mega Man fight a robotic elephant, as Volume 228's Mega Man 9 screenshot illustrates. Look below to see what you readers thought about this fight for the ages. This month we've got another fight on our hands. Who's going to win? We don't know, but email your best captions to **screentest@nintendopower.com** anyway.

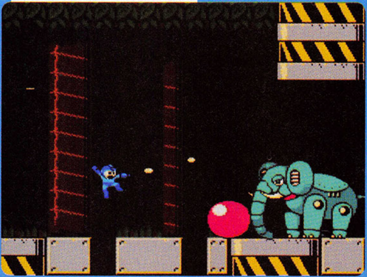
THIS MONTH'S SHOT



Ladies and gentlemen, the world's most disturbing pirouette.

HERE'S OUR CAPTION.
THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?

VOLUME 238'S SHOT



Mega Man, a boy who was dying from fall-in-a-pit-itis, got his dying wish to see a crazy metallic elephant. —**MIKE P.**

"I knew I should've beaten Rodent Man first! His mouserang definitely would've taken this guy out!" —**DAVID F.**

Little did Mega Man know that he would have to face Blubble the Red and his pachyderm pal, Rhombo. —**BECKENOR**

"Oh, Madame Elephanta, tell me the secret of beating you with the magic of your red crystal ball...." —**FISHERSPOT**

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NEXT MONTH

Don't be left out in the cold. A chilling tale is coming exclusively to Wii, and Nintendo Power will bring you the scoop. Also, get the story on Sonic creator Yuji Naka's Let's Tap for Wii, as well as a few surprises.

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